

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
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Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2 50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey

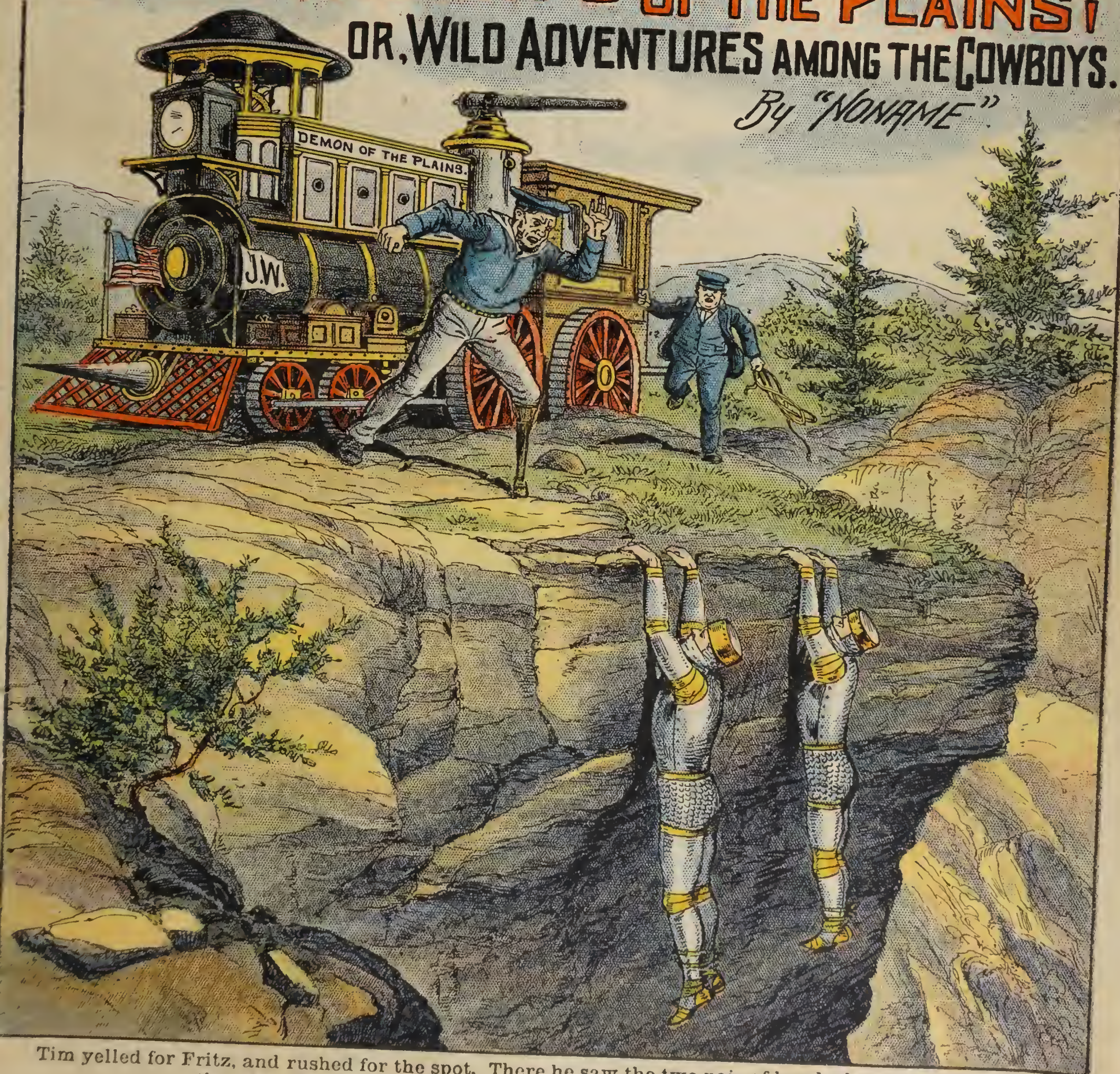
No. 258.

NEW YORK, MAY 13, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

JACK WRIGHT'S - DEMON - OF THE PLAINS; OR, WILD ADVENTURES AMONG THE COWBOYS.

By "NONAME"



Tim yelled for Fritz, and rushed for the spot. There he saw the two pair of hands desperately clutching the rock. Poor Jack and Charley were almost upon the point of letting go. "Bring a rope!" yelled Tim.

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JACK WRIGHT'S DEMON OF THE PLAINS;

OR,

Wild Adventures Among the Cowboys.

By "NONAME."

J. J. MILLER,
DEALER IN CIGARS & TOBACCO
We Sell and Exchange Books,
320 East 18th St. Kansas City, Mo.

CHAPTER I.

THE DRUGGED GLASS.

"I won this \$30,000 in the lottery. Will you please cash this check?"

The speaker was a well-built young man, clad in a stylish suit of clothing, and he stood at the cashier's window in a Wall Street bank in the afternoon of a gloomy day in March.

He had a thin, bony face, a sharp nose, dark hair, a pair of flashing black eyes, and a dashing air that individualized him very strongly.

The bank cashier took the check, opened wide his eyes, and said:

"You are very lucky, Jack Wright. Everything you touch seems to turn into gold. How in the world came you to purchase a lottery ticket?"

An amused laugh escaped the fortunate young man.

"Oh, I don't know," he replied carelessly. "I seldom gamble; but some time ago I chanced to pass the office of a lottery ticket agency, and following out a mere whim I went in and bought the ticket. To my astonishment, it won. An express company collected the amount, and to-day gave me this check. I endorsed it, and as I have an account here I want to leave two-thirds of the amount with this bank, and take a third back to Wrightstown with me, as I'm now going home."

The cashier cashed the check, and the young man moved away from the window to let the next man in line take his turn.

The next man proved to be an out-of-town depositor, too, named Simon Crow—a dirty, wrinkled old man, with vulture eyes, a hooked nose, a rusty stovepipe hat, and an old patched suit of clothes.

He kept a tavern.

He was accompanied by his son Bob—a thin, haggard, long-haired young man, with fierce, sunken eyes, and a close-cut, bristly red mustache.

They watched Jack Wright enviously.

Perhaps they had cause to, for he was the most celebrated

young man in the world, as he had won great distinction at an early age by having invented the most marvelous electrical submarine boats, overland engines and flying machines.

Jack had been left an orphan when a boy, resided in the pretty little fisher village of Wrightstown, up the Atlantic coast, gained a large fortune by the use of his famous inventions, and was married and had a son.

An old sailor, named Tim Topstay, and a fat young Dutchman called Fritz Schneider, both of whom he had once befriended, lived with the young inventor, assisted him to construct his marvelous inventions, and always aided him to run them when he went off on various trips he had made with them in the past.

The young inventor deposited \$20,000, and retaining the remaining \$10,000 in his pocket he left the bank, ignorant and indifferent of the fact that the old man with the vulture eyes had been intently listening to all he said to his friend the bank cashier.

Glancing at his massive gold watch, Jack saw that it was nearly three o'clock when he left the bank.

He had no other business to transact in New York, and therefore made his way to the railroad depot, intending to return home.

He called a cab and was driven away.

Upon reaching the depot he found that there would not be a train for Wrightstown for two hours, and as the weather looked very threatening, he purchased a copy of a paper and sat down to pass away the time reading.

By the time the train started the sky had grown very dark, and it began to rain in torrents, but the young inventor was so amply protected from the rain, he paid but little heed to the elements.

This state of calm, peaceful contentment did not last more than two hours, however, for there suddenly pealed out the sharp, quick blasts of the locomotive whistle.

It was soon followed by the grinding and crunching sound of the air-brakes forcing the shoes against the wheels, just as the flying train ran into a tunnel.

The next moment there came a terrific bang, the train

paused with a shock, glasses were shattered to fragments, and jingled out of the windows, lights were extinguished, men yelled, women screamed, children howled, and in a moment the direst confusion ensued.

"A collision—a collision!" yelled several of the passengers.

Then there was a wild rush for the door, and a mass of roaring, fighting and struggling humanity became wedged there in their wild, frantic efforts to get out and off the train.

A conductor alighted and rushed ahead with his lantern, when he found that the switchman had carelessly left a switch open, causing a south-bound train to run onto the track Jack was traversing.

The collision that ensued in the tunnel had derailed and badly smashed the other locomotive, flung it over, forming a blockade, and although nobody was injured, a vexatious delay was staring every one squarely in the face.

Jack was disgusted.

He went out in the tunnel and viewed the overturned locomotive.

It would occupy several hours to clear away the wreck, and as he had told his wife that he would be at home within a specified time, and feared his long delay would frighten her, he resolved to walk on to the next village, hire a carriage, and drive home.

With this determination in view, he turned up his coat collar, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and started off.

The fierce wind blew sharply in his face, driving the rain in slanting sheets against his body, drenching him to the skin; the ground was covered with mud and puddles, and the gloom was only dispelled when the blinding lightning flashed in the murky sky.

But Jack pressed on resolutely.

His wet clothing stuck to his skin, and the piercing wind chilled him.

In half an hour he observed a dull light shining ahead, which at first he imagined proceeded from the village he desired to reach, but upon a nearer approach he found that it came from a dilapidated old tavern, standing at the fork of a country road.

It was a weather-beaten place, covered with shingles, having a pump in front and several tumble-down old buildings in the rear, while over the door there swung a creaking sign which bore the legend in faded letters:

SIMON CROW'S

Half Way House.

Accommodations for Man or Beast.

Although the ancient hostelry was a dingy and forbidding place under ordinary circumstances, it now had an alluring aspect for the storm-beaten young traveler, and he paused before the door.

"Perhaps I can hire a rig here to carry me to Wrightstown," he cogitated. "It will save me a further journey through this furious storm. At any rate, it will be no harm to stop in and find out if I can."

He pushed open the door, and, followed by a roaring gust of wind that drove a slanting sheet of rain after him, he entered the tap room.

Coming from the darkness out of doors into the light of the greasy lamps that illuminated the interior with their dull, flickering glow, Jack closed the door and stood blinking for a moment until he became used to the light, and then glanced around.

He found himself in a musty little room, with a strong odor of stale beer, a dusty and dingy bar at one side, several tables and chairs stood around on the sanded floor, a stove glowed in the middle of the apartment, a few cheap prints

hung on the discolored walls, and a door in back led to a hall.

Behind the bar stood the bony old man with the vulture eyes who had been in the bank.

He gave a slight start when his glance fell upon Jack, and assuming a leering smile he softly rubbed his skinny hands together and croaked:

"By the saints, this is a bad night to be out in, stranger!"

"You are right," assented Jack, standing so close to the cheerful fire that a hot steam was soon coming from his wet clothing. "It is a dreadful night. And you would not have caught me out in it only for a deplorable accident that happened in the railroad tunnel."

"Indeed! And what was that?"

"A collision, in consequence of a misplaced switch."

"Dear me! How sad! And was anybody killed?"

"Not a soul; but there was a delay in prospect, and as I was very anxious to hasten back to Wrightstown I came on afoot in hopes of being able to hire a carriage. Could I get one here?"

"By the saints, yes," replied Simon Crow, nodding his weazened old head and showing his yellow, fang-like teeth in a diabolical grin. "We can accommodate you, sir. Of course we can. But hadn't you better dry your drenched clothing before you venture out again? You may catch cold. Nor would a glass of hot rum come amiss. What say you?"

"Why, yes. You are very kind and considerate to think of it," replied Jack, with a look of aversion at the old rascal, for he had such a repulsive face that it inspired a feeling of deep distrust to the beholder. "I will not abandon my clothing, however. They can dry on me while I sit here close to the fire. But you can brew me a good hot drink to prevent me from catching cold, and then order a horse and top carriage for me as soon as possible."

"Certainly; certainly, sir," croaked Simon Crow.

And he began to prepare a steaming punch for his guest, all the while casting sly, furtive glances at him out of the corners of his vulture eyes, and working his lips as if mumbling to himself.

Jack paid but little heed to him.

He remained plunged in deep thought, as he crouched by the fire, a kettle on top of it, steaming and singing a drowsy song, while the landlord went on rattling the glasses and mixing the drink.

In a short time it was ready.

"Now, sir," exclaimed the old reprobate, "here you are, and by the saints it's a mighty good punch, too. Drink while it is hot."

Jack arose and glanced at the steaming glass.

Then he took it up and swallowed its contents.

"It's a good drink," he remarked. "It warms me up, and—and——"

But almost instantly he was seized with a violent fit of giddiness. The room whirled around and around furiously.

"Great God! What is this?" he gasped hoarsely. "I am blind—fainting——"

He fixed a glaring, accusing look upon the withered-up landlord.

"Taken sick, poor fellow," he faintly heard Simon Crow croaking.

"Have you poisoned me?" fairly shrieked Jack.

"No, no! I am an honest man. Let me assist you to a bedroom."

"Lead the way. Send for a doctor—quick!"

"Yes. Have no alarm, my poor, poor boy."

And with a look of sinister exultation upon his ugly face, the old scoundrel gently led Jack out the hall door and up the dark stairs.

CHAPTER II.

AN ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION.

Jack's brain was in a whirl, his limbs tottered beneath him, a deathly sensation of faintness was striving to master him, and he could not think coherently.

But, with true Yankee grit, he fought off the awful feeling, and with a strong suspicion of foul play haunting his mind, he staggered into a rear bedroom, the door of which Simon Crow flung open.

A piece of tallow candle stood up on the mantel, its wavering light throwing a grim, ghostly glow through the old-fashioned room.

Here the repulsive landlord left him, saying something about sending for a doctor, and closing the door noisily descended the rickety stairs.

Alone in the room, the suspicions preying upon Jack's mind caused him to lock and bolt the door and windows to assure himself that no one could get in to injure him while he slept.

It was impossible to fight away his intense longing to lie down upon the big, old-fashioned, canopy-top, four-post bed that stood in the corner, for an irresistible feeling of sleepiness had stolen upon him.

His mind was too utterly confused to think of a reason for the strange feeling that overpowered him immediately after drinking the hot punch Simon Crow had brewed for him.

Indeed, the sleeper he became the more indifferent he became to his surroundings, and he flung himself upon the soft, yielding feather mattress and fell into a deep, profound slumber.

His heavy stentorious breathing soon broke the silence, and vied with the harsh rattling of the windows in the gale, the dreary patter of the raindrops against the panes, and the ticking of a clock.

Behind the wainscoting there sounded the gnawing and scampering of rats, the clumsy, antique furniture took on a weird aspect as the lightning outside flashed before the windows, and the candle burned lower and lower until, just as there sounded the muffled gong of the clock striking eleven, it sputtered and went out.

A thick gloom then enveloped the quaint old room.

Jack was fast asleep, as if he were a corpse, for there had been a stupefying drug put in the punch the landlord made him, and he had succumbed to its deadly influence.

A few moments after the clock stopped striking the hour there sounded the soft, stealthy patter of muffled footsteps out in the hall, and somebody moved the door knob in an effort to get in.

The door was so secured that it did not budge, and after a short interval of silence two whispering voices outside became engaged in a low dialogue, after which an eye was applied to the keyhole.

A flash of sheet lightning flared up in the sky.

It flung its ghastly radiance into the room upon the sleeper.

Jack lay upon his back in the middle of the bed.

His hand was clutched upon his bosom pocket instinctively, for it was there he had placed his wallet containing the \$10,000 which Simon Crow had seen him draw from the bank that afternoon.

A few moments after Jack's figure was revealed by the flash of lightning, the footfalls receded from his bedroom door.

Fully an hour passed by.

At the expiration of that space of time the young inventor began to partially recover from the somniferous effects of the drug.

He stirred uneasily a few moments, and suddenly opened his eyes.

His mind was somewhat hazy at first, and he did not know exactly where he was; but the moment that what had happened dawned upon his mind he quickly pulled his wits together.

"That blackguard of a landlord must have drugged me," flashed across his mind, but he felt his money safe enough, and knew that as yet no effort had been made to rob him.

The face of Simon Crow looked familiar to him, yet he could not recall to mind that he had seen him in the bank that day.

How long had he lain sleeping on the bed?

It was too dark to see there, although the rest of the shadowy room had taken in some light from the windows, for the wild storm had spent its fury, and the moon now showed its silvery disc through the openings of the flying cloud banks at irregular and long intervals.

The ticking of the clock reached Jack's ears, and he glanced across the room in an effort to see its dial.

He could just make it out, but could not distinguish the hands.

As he stared at it, straining his vision to the utmost, he was suddenly surprised to see a dark shadow slowly but surely creeping down over the face of the clock.

For a moment Jack imagined it was an optical delusion.

But no—a keener glance showed him that half the dial was hidden at the top, and the rest was swiftly becoming obscured.

Jack rubbed his eyes and looked again.

Now he noted what occasioned the eclipse of the dial.

"Merciful Heaven!" he gasped, in tones of horrified amazement. "Am I crazy—muddled—dreaming—drunk, or is the canopy of the bed coming down toward me, with the silence of a shadow?"

The whole square top was, he saw, sliding down the bed-posts upon the tops of which its corners had apparently been fastened.

It was sinking so gradually that he saw that it was not the mere force of accident that caused it to move, and it was coming right straight down upon him as he lay there.

A cold chill passed over Jack.

His eyes bulged out, he broke into a perspiration, and for the space of a few moments he became fairly paralyzed with horror.

Glaring up more intently now, he observed that it was the heavy fringe bordering the velvet curtains that hung from the canopy that in coming down hid the face of the clock from his view.

Jack lay motionless, breathless and speechless.

He realized that the bed was a mechanical death trap.

He had been lured into the infernal machine to be killed.

The sight of the canopy within a few inches of his face and still swiftly descending broke the spell that transfixed him.

He uttered a stifled cry of alarm.

Then he sprang from the bed to the floor, and now saw that the murderous canopy was a thick pad, worked down by screws in the cores of the bed-posts, that were operated by somebody in the room above.

"Made to smother me to death!" he gasped. "My God! what den of vice have I so unwittingly stumbled into here?"

He glanced at the thick pad and observed that it was pressing down strongly upon the mattress.

Had a man been lying there all utterance would have been smothered, all motion of the body and limbs prevented, and the horrible pad would slowly but surely have smothered him to death.

The melancholy chime of the clock pealed out twelve times.

It was midnight.

Jack roused himself from a reverie.

"I must escape from this terrible den," he muttered, desperately. "If I remain the old assassin may carry out his design some other way. Should I go out the same way I entered the rascal will see him. No, I will get out by one of those windows, and make my way to the nearest village, apprise the police, and have him arrested."

He started to cross the room, when a sharp, metallic click reached his ears, and with all the effects of the drug swept from his mind before the realization that only by retaining his wits he could save his life, he suddenly crouched behind the center table.

Scarcely had he so concealed himself when he was startled to see a secret door in the wainscoting swing open.

A man's face, half covered with a black mask, appeared in the dark opening.

He wore a slouched hat, and the light fell upon a long, glittering knife held clutched in his right hand.

For the space of a moment he lurked in the secret recess in the wall, and glared into the room with a fierce, malignant look.

He then came through the opening, and stood up.

Jack was surprised to see that he was not the landlord.

It increased his anxiety, for it showed conclusively that the fellow had an accomplice in his murderous design.

The young inventor was not frightened, but the trying ordeal was working strongly upon his nerves, as all the methods employed by these people were hidden so adroitly.

He could not tell from which quarter they were about to attack until they exposed themselves.

Such secret assassins were to be feared.

The masked man glided toward the bed in a crouching attitude, and just as he reached the table Jack arose up in front of him.

The stranger was startled.

A smothered cry escaped him.

He saw that the murderous bed had failed.

Regarding the man a moment in silence, Jack exclaimed:

"Hold on, you cur! I have baffled you."

A fierce gleam shot out of the eye-holes of the black mask.

The rascal paused, drew back his knife, and then hissed:

"But you shall not escape with your life to betray us."

And so saying he made a rush for Jack, brandishing the dagger.

Jack coolly awaited the attack.

He was unarmed, but he had an athlete's training, was possessed of enormous strength, knew how to handle his fists.

As the assassin reached him, and aimed a savage stab at his heart with his knife, he swiftly sprang aside.

The keen point just missed its intended victim, and ripped open Jack's coat at the left side.

Before the man could recover the use of his weapon, Jack dealt him a punch in the face that knocked off his mask, broke his nose, and knocked him spinning across the room.

The moonlight revealed his features to the young inventor.

He was Bob Crow, the landlord's son.

Jack was just about to follow him up, when the tavern keeper came through the panel door, with a revolver in his hand.

He aimed the weapon at Jack, as his vulture eyes took in the situation, and fired a shot.

It was poorly aimed, and missed its mark.

Before the rascal could fire again, Jack sprang at the villain, knocked the weapon from his hand, and grasped him by the throat.

His son became frightened.

He rushed to the window, sprang through, carrying glass and all with him in his desperation, reached the ground in a heap, rolled over and over, arose, and then ran away.

CHAPTER III.

SAVING A MAN'S LIFE.

A terrible struggle began between Jack and Simon Crow, and they fell to the floor locked in a tight embrace.

The old tavern keeper was rendered powerful with desperation over the plight into which he suddenly found himself placed.

Jack never relaxed his grip on the old villain's throat, and as he increased the pressure of his sinuous fingers the assassin grew black in the face, began to gag, his tongue swelled and protruded from between his parted fangs, and his eyeballs bulged from their sockets.

Soon his strength gave out.

He could not last long against the powerful young inventor.

All his motions then became spasmodic.

"Mercy!" he gurgled at length.

"I'll choke the life out of you unless you submit," panted Jack.

"Lord, I'll give in! Stop—I'm dying, curse you!"

His legs, arms and fingers stiffened out as he spoke, and a deep, wheezing sound accompanied every gasp he gave.

Jack let go of him.

Swiftly seizing a sheet from the bed, he bound the old reprobate hand and foot, and then arose to his feet.

Simon Crow slowly recovered his faculties.

His rage knew no bounds when he found himself a prisoner, utterly at the mercy of the young man he intended to kill.

"I'll have your life for this," he howled frantically. "You release me! Holy heavens, won't I make you sweat for this! By the saints, I'll slit your windpipe if I get free."

"Shut up!" ordered Jack, frowning at the satanic old rascal. "I'll gag you if you don't keep still. Do you hear me?"

"What a fool I was not to give you a dose of arsenic instead of a mere sleeping draught," croaked the landlord dismally.

"Who else have you engaged in this diabolical work?"

"None of your business," snarled Crow.

"I'll soon find out, then," said Jack.

He picked up the pistol from the floor and left the room.

A search of the tavern failed to reveal a soul, but he found the mechanism that worked the infernal bed in the garret over his sleeping apartment.

Then he discovered a trap door leading down into the cellar.

Taking one of the store lamps, he opened the trap and passed down a flight of steep stairs into a damp, musty cellar under the taproom.

He had scarcely reached the bottom when a deep groan reached his ears, and he held the lamp aloft and glanced around.

He saw no sign of the person who uttered it.

The cellar he was in was a small, square, stone-walled place with nothing in it, and had no openings but the trap he came through.

Locating the sound as coming from behind a rear wall and seeing no sign of a door, it suddenly occurred to Jack that there might be another cellar in back of the one he was in.

But how he was to reach it he did not know.

He returned to the room where he had left his prisoner, and found him swearing and muttering to himself furiously.

It occurred to Jack that he had not yet explored the passage in the wall, by means of which Crow and his son made their entrance.

"It is barely possible that it may lead me down into the cellar from whence those groans came," he muttered.

Paying no heed to the savage threats made by the inn-keeper, Jack passed through the secret door, carrying a lamp, and found himself in a corridor built between the outer and inner walls of the old building, which ran the depth of the house.

Opposite each room he found a secret door of access.

It was thus plain that any one could enter one room and get into any other room in the house, even if the common doors were locked.

At the end of the passage he found a flight of stairs descending, and going down he found a similar passage on the ground floor.

A second staircase led him into a small cellar, divided from the front cellar by the stone wall he had encountered.

To Jack's horror, he observed the skeletons of several human beings scattered about on the floor, bleached as white as snow.

In the midst of these poor relics lay a living man.

It was he whom Jack had heard groaning.

The poor wretch was bound hand and foot with ropes.

He was a tall, raw-boned fellow, with long, dark hair, prominent, clean-shaven, sunburned features, and he wore a suit such as are worn by the cowboys of the Southwest.

As soon as he saw the lamplight, he shouted wildly:

"Bring me some food and water, consarn ye! D'you want me to die?"

An army of rats had been swarming around him, and had bit at his flesh wherever it was exposed, leaving it mangled, bleeding and sore.

They scampered away at the approach of the light, and Jack rushed down to the poor wretch, drew his pocket knife, and cut him free.

"Jewittaker!" exclaimed the man in astonishment. "What's this? Am I free? Ain't you one of their thieving, murderous gang?"

"My name is Jack Wright. The two men of this establishment have made an effort to murder and rob me, but I have thwarted them, and, searching their den, have just found you."

The man warmly shook Jack's hand.

"You have saved my life, and I'm obliged to you for it. My name is Charles Ashton, but they call me Lasso Charley in the West."

"How did you happen to fall into the power of these villains?"

"Well, I have a married sister living pretty nigh here, and I came East to see her and make my will, to leave it with her in case I died."

"Your will?"

"That's about the size of it. Sounds kinder queer for a poor cowboy to talk that way, but while I've been herding in Nevada I struck rich soil. It was full of gold, and will be worth a fortune if I can ever work the claim. Living the wild life I did, I feared that somebody would get it away from me by gambling, robbery or some other means, so I made up my mind to leave my claim papers with my sister. That's why I came East. Leaving the railroad depot, I started on to walk to her house, and as I was passing this tavern I went in to get a drink. That's the last I remember till I woke up, found I'd been robbed of my money, valuables and

the paper, and discovered an old man and his son standing near me dividing the booty. I heard the young fellow say he'd go to Nevada and work the claim if he found it pay dirt. Then they left me here, and I haven't seen anybody ever since. It must be two days ago."

"Then you are hungry, thirsty, and the wounds inflicted by the rats require attention," said Jack.

"You are right."

"Look at all these skeletons."

"Must be the remains of former victims of these men."

"Exposed in their rascality, I suppose the landlord's son will leave this neighborhood, and go down to Nevada to get at your gold claim."

"That's just what I think and fear," said Lasso Charley in tones of anxiety. "My sister is very poor, and as I have been robbed of all my money, I don't see how I'm going to get back there to prevent that rascal getting the best of me."

"Don't alarm yourself," replied Jack reassuringly. "for I will see you through your difficulty."

"You!" echoed the cowboy, staring at him in amazement.

"Exactly. I am an inventor, and have recently completed building an electric overland motor, with which I intended to take a pleasure trip across the continent to California. You can go with my friends and I. In fact, I may, if I find that the case warrants it, lend you a hand to get your gold mine in operation."

The cowboy was more and more struck by this assurance.

"Jack Wright," he exclaimed emotionally, "you have taken all the starch clean out of me by your kind assurance. If you will do as you say I swear I'll form a partnership with you in the mining claim, and equally divide the profits when I sell it."

Jack laughed quietly.

"Don't say any more about it," he exclaimed. "Let us take the murderous landlord to the village, put him in jail, explain what we have endured and discovered, and convict the villain. Then you can go to your sister's house, and from there join me in Wrightstown to-morrow."

With this understanding, they went upstairs to the tap-room, and after the cowboy had washed his wounds, he found a quantity of crackers, cheese, ham and any amount of drinkables.

While he was appeasing his appetite, Jack went upstairs, and loosening Simon Crow's legs, he grasped the trembling old wretch by the collar, jerked him to his feet, pointed the pistol at his head, and said:

"Come along with me."

Resistance was perfectly useless, so the landlord obeyed.

He was greatly terrified when he saw Lasso Charley downstairs, and more so when the cowboy took hold of him by one arm, while Jack seized the other, and they marched him out.

"What are you going to do with me?" he growled.

"Put you in jail for trying to murder us," promptly replied Jack.

The old rascal evidently anticipated this reply.

He lapsed into a grim silence, and they soon reached the village.

Here he was put in the lock-up, an affidavit of the villainy he practiced was made by Jack and the cowboy, and while Lasso Charley went to his sister's house, the young inventor hired a horse and carriage, and drove on to Wrightstown.

Here he lived in a magnificent house.

Putting up the rig, he met his wife, explained what had happened, locked the \$10,000 in his safe, and went to bed.

The following morning Jack arose late.

Having had his breakfast, he passed out into the garden,

at the foot of which stood his big workshop on the bank of a creek.

He had his new invention stored in this building, and as he made his way toward it to have a look at the machine, he was suddenly startled by hearing a fearful cry.

"Help! Help! Help!" screamed a frantic voice.

It came from within the shop.

A startled exclamation burst from Jack's lips, and he rushed down the path at the top of his speed.

Upon reaching the shop door, he flung it open and ran in.

A thrilling scene met his view.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEMON OF THE PLAINS.

In the middle of the vast room Jack had penetrated there stood the singular locomotive-like electric carriage which he had invented, and beside it two men were furiously struggling on the floor.

One of them was Tim Topstay, the young inventor's friend.

He was a wooden-legged old fellow, with a sandy beard and glass eye; he wore a sailor's costume upon his broad, squat figure, and had a look of unutterable horror upon his sun-burned, good-natured face.

He lay flat on his back.

The other man was a total stranger to Jack.

He knelt upon Tim's bosom, and pinned him down to the floor by clutching him by the throat with his left hand, while with his right he aimed a revolver at the old fellow's forehead.

A stylish suit of clothing covered his slender figure, a high silk hat he had worn lay upon the ground, and his dark face was adorned by a curling mustache.

In an instant Jack had drawn a revolver, with which he had provided himself in the house, leveled it, and fired.

The weapon worked pneumatically, giving no report, but the ball was filled with an explosive powder of Jack's invention, consisting of a residuum cast by three parts of nitrogen to one of hydrogen.

It burst when it hit the man with a deafening report, and a wild, frenzied yell of pain escaped the individual; he dropped the weapon with which he had been menacing Tim, rolled over upon the floor, writhing, kicking and twisting, and the old sailor arose.

"Blow me!" he gasped. "Yer hove in jist in time, my lad."

"Why was he attacking you, Tim?"

"'Cause I tackled him first."

"What did he do to arouse your temper?"

"Do? Waal, he done enough, I'm thinkin'. Ha' ye got this coach patented?"

"No—not yet. Why do you ask?"

"'Cause this lubber came sneakin' in here to steal yer invention."

"To steal it?"

"Aye—ter steal ther plan. I caught him examinin' her all over an' writin' down in a note-book all about her. Then I went fer him, an' we fit, when wot should ther lubber do but try ter kill me."

"Where's Fritz?"

"Lyn' senseless inside o' ther coach."

"Senseless?"

"Aye. This feller hit him on ther head fer doin' as I did."

"He must be a bad man," said Jack.

The stranger recovered from the first paroxysm of pain he had been suffering, and made a rush for his pistol.

Before he could reach it, and carry out the murderous plan he evidently had in view, Jack sprang forward and dealt him a sledge-hammer blow in the face that knocked him down again.

"Back, you dog!" he cried. "Back with you!"

"By heavens, I'll kill you for this!" hissed the other.

Jack sprang upon him and tore his coat open.

"Give me the book you've used to describe the secret of my invention," he cried. "I won't allow you to rob me in this murderous fashion."

"Let go of me!" screamed the man, struggling furiously to wrench himself away. "You shall not have it. You——"

But just then Jack found the book.

He pulled it out of the thief's pocket and flung it to Tim.

"Take charge of this!" he cried.

"Oh, if I only had a weapon!" gritted the stranger wildly.

"And now that I have no further use for you," continued Jack, "I will rid myself of you after the most approved method of locomotion I have ever exercised upon sneaking curs of your stamp before."

And so saying, he exerted all his enormous strength, jerked the fellow upon his feet, grabbed him by the back of the neck, and soundly booted him out of the shop, across the garden and into the street.

Here he let the howling dandy go.

And he did go with a vengeance.

Never pausing to look back, he took to his heels and ran as if the Archfiend was chasing him.

Along he scudded, and he never paused until he had vanished from sight around the nearest corner.

Jack was highly satisfied with this exploit.

He had frequently been pestered with cranks and people who were anxious to steal his ideas to make capital for themselves, but never before had encountered so venomous a rascal as this one.

Never expecting to hear of him again, he returned to the shop.

There he found Tim had revived Fritz.

Mr. Schneider wore a suit of clothes that certainly would have made a German peasant's heart burst with pride, but it was sadly at variance with the prevailing fashion of this country.

He was a little fat Dutchman, with a round, apple-dumpling face, a pair of remarkably watery blue eyes, and a shock head of yellow hair rising from an intellectual forehead.

By nature Fritz was a veritable fire-eater.

"Py shiminey Christmas," he vociferated, as Jack came in, "if I only had a glub vhen dot son-ohf-a-sea-gooks gave me dot tump by der het, I would a-busted his eye oud al-retty."

"I firmly believe we have seen the last of him now, boys," said Jack, with a smile. "Was anybody seriously damaged?"

"No, my lad, thanks ter yer timely arrival," replied Tim, taking a big chew of navy plug, on which he usually fed between meals. "I recollect when I wuz aboard o' ther old frigate Wabash, in ther navy, as I came nigh ter gittin' killed."

"Donnervetter!" roared Fritz, interrupting him. "don't id vos pad enough dot I near vos half me mein heads proke mitoud dot you fill me mit more droubles dellin' dot stories?"

"Don't yer want me ter spin yer ther yarn?" queried Tim, in injured tones, as he shot a sad look at Fritz with his solitary optic.

"Do yer want me ter blay yer a dupe by mein apoo deons?"

"No, no! Fer heaven's sake, no! I hates that 'ere insterment."

"Und I hates yer bick lies."

"Hold on, now," interposed Jack, to avoid an altercation. "I have got some news for you both, of great interest."

"Wot about?" queried Tim interestedly.

Jack then told them of his experience with Simon Crow.

He also described his meeting with Charles Ashton, and the story the cowboy had told about the rich gold lead he had discovered.

In conclusion he explained about the offer made to the man to go to Nevada in the Demon of the Plains, as the electric coach was named, and make an effort to secure possession of the mine.

Both Tim and Fritz heartily endorsed the plan.

They were in favor of going right off.

"We wuz a-goin' ter start on a land cruise in ther Demon anyway next Saturday as far as Californy," said Tim, "so as thar's a great sight more inducement in goin' ter Nevady, why, Lor' bless yer heart, let's take it in, my lad."

"I'm very much in favor of it," said Jack. "There is bound to be lots of fun and excitement for us among the cowboys, Indians and miners, and I only want your assent to accompany me to settle the whole project in my mind."

"Fer sure ve go," said Fritz, "and glad ohf it mit der bargain also."

"Then it's settled," said Jack. "Lasso Charley will be here to-day, and we will finish our arrangements, as the Demon is ready."

"Aye, aye! We put wot little extree ideas in her as you suggested while yer wuz sailin' aroun' New York," said Tim.

"Then I'll look her over, as I'm out here."

The coach was a large vehicle, built entirely of aluminum, which rendered it exceedingly light in proportion to its size, and strong as steel.

There were eight broad, cogged wheels supplied with an air-brake, that supported a truck made up of a complicated electrical mechanism worked by the storage battery system, the front truck working on a king-pin, in order to turn by a wheel in the turret.

A powerful searchlight stood in front, and a pneumatic gun was mounted upon a small revolving turret upon the indented roof.

Inside the car there were three rooms beside the turret, the one in the back containing a small dynamo and oil engine for charging the batteries when they became exhausted, and a small, powerful air-pump.

This apartment also contained an electrical cooking stove, water tanks, provision lockers, tools, arms, ammunition and many useful articles.

Directly opposite the side doors in the next room was a small spiral staircase to get up into the gun-turret and manage the piece.

This room was used as a combined dining and sleeping room.

The apartment in front was a very handsomely appointed general living room, in which stood the stairs leading into the turret.

The batteries were stored in a compartment under the floor, each set of wheels having an independent motor.

Jack made a critical examination of his new acquisition, and with a well-satisfied look upon his face, he returned to his friends.

"Perfect in every detail," he remarked. "At the trial trip we gave her the other night her mechanism operated like clock-work, and she showed a speed of fifty miles an hour. She may do better now."

steal yer ideas," said Tim. "He could a-got a patent ahead o' yer, an' made a fortune out of it."

"True. Let me see what he has got written in that book."

Tim handed it over, and Jack glanced through the pages.

He was startled to find that the man was a skillful draughtsman, for he had reproduced an exact facsimile of the motor's working parts, and written perfect descriptions of them.

Armed with such a weapon as this, he could easily have cheated the young inventor out of his patent right.

Continuing to turn over the pages, Jack came to the draught of a letter written at the end of the book.

He read it, and a cry of astonishment pealed from his lips.

"Thunder!" he gasped.

"Wot's amiss?" asked Tim anxiously.

"You should read this letter."

"Let us hear vot it says?" said Fritz.

CHAPTER V.

OFF FOR NEVADA.

Jack had good reason to be startled by the contents of the letter, for it showed him plainly that he had been made the victim of a pair of the most unscrupulous rascals.

Seeing how curious his companions were over the contents of the letter, he began to read it aloud to them.

It was worded this way:

"Bob Crow:—Your note received this A. M., stating that you and your father had secured some valuable papers from the cowboy, showing where a rich gold claim was staked. As you failed to get the money you saw Jack Wright take from the New York bank when he arrived at your tavern last night, and as he has succeeded in putting the old man in jail, I advise you to skip to Nevada. I'll join you at D—in two weeks from to-day. At present I have some important work to perform. Having heard of a syndicate who are willing to pay a big price for the patent of an electric carriage such as Wright recently invented, I mean to get possession of the secret to construct one, and have it patented ahead of the inventor, from which deal I can make a big pile.

"It is necessary, however, for me to keep in the background, as I am wanted by the police for complicity in the Columbia bank robbery. You can write me again to the same address.

Martin Dale."

Tim and Fritz were as much surprised as Jack was.

Beneath the letters was marked the key to a cipher alphabet.

It was therefore evident why the letter had first been written off in the regular way, the rascal apparently designed to copy it letter for letter in the cipher, to disguise its purport when sending it.

He was probably in league with Bob Crow.

Jack now knew the name of his assailants at the tavern, and was also given to understand the motive prompting them.

It recalled to his mind that he had seen the tavern keeper and his son in the bank where he had gone to cash the check.

Everything was now as plain as day to the young inventor, and he turned to his two friends, and said:

"This explains everything to me, boys!"

"Gee whiz! Wot a game!" ejaculated Tim.

"Dey vos hate ohf dem bad mens," Fritz commented

Jack then told them about the cipher, and they concurred with his opinion that the letter was to have been transformed with it for mailing.

Martin Dale, although a gentlemanly appearing fellow, was evidently a bank burgler, or crook of some other sort, for he had openly confessed in the letter that he was wanted by the police.

In view of what had transpired, and the fact that he knew that the contents of his letter in the book would be exposed, he would now take pains to make himself very scarce.

"Had I known what was written in this book before I fired him out," said Jack, regretfully, "I would have handed him over to the police. It's too late to do anything now, however."

"Aye," assented Tim. "It reminds me o' a leetle incident wot happened ter me when I wuz in ther navy. Yer see, we'd tackled a pirate on ther island o' Ruatan one mornin', an' blowin' his ship an' the town ter pieces, we went ashore ter search fer his treasure. No one could find it until I happened ter go down in ther cellar o' ther captain's house, when, wot d'yer think?"

"What?" asked Jack.

"Thar wuz a hull cellar full o' treasure! But ther place wuz filled wi' ther rascals, an' they aimed a hundred weapings at me. I thought my last hour had come, until I saw a keg."

"A keg?"

"Aye! It wuz filled wi' powder, an' I yelled to 'em ter le' me be, or I'd blow 'em ter pieces by droppin' my candle inter ther powder."

"And they obeyed?"

"Lordy, no! They rushed fer me. Seein' as it wuzn't no use to argify with 'em, I pegged ther lit candle inter ther powder keg. Thar wuz a terrible explosion. Ther hull crew wuz ripped inter hash, an' they sailed up in ther sky with ther shattered remains of ther big stone house overhead, an' all o' ther wast treasure. I stood thar laughin' at 'em, but suddenly I remembered as I'd oughtenter done it, 'cause I not only put them outer ther way, but lost ther treasure as well."

"How was it the explosion didn't hurt you, if you stood near enough to the powder keg to drop a candle into it?" asked Jack, pointedly.

The smile of satisfaction fled from Tim's face.

He looked very much confused, scratched his head in perplexity, gave a grunt and a cough, turned very red, and finally blurted out:

"Why—yer see—I—that is—blast it, I dunno how I escaped."

Jack and Fritz burst out laughing.

The old sailor had become such a consummate liar that he actually believed the yarns conjured up by his vivid imagination; but, like most liars, he invariably exposed a weak spot in his stories that was bound to give him away to the most casual observer.

Fortunately for him, an electric bell on the wall rang just then, and Jack went to the door and flung it open.

Upon the threshold stood Lasso Charley.

"Hello!" said Jack, shaking hands with him. "I see you have arrived."

"Yes," replied the cowboy smilingly. "Spent the night with my sister, and I gave her an account of our adventure at the old inn. After that I went to court and gave my evidence against the old tavern keeper. He was given a long term of imprisonment. Then I came here."

Jack introduced him to the sailor and the Dutchman.

He then showed him the motor, and won the most extravagant expressions of delight and amazement from him over the machine.

In one of the rooms of the motor there stood two big cages containing a monkey and a parrot, named Whisker and Blumark respectively.

The bird belonged to the Dutchman and the beast to the sailor.

They had captured them in Africa during their first trip with Jack, and ever since had taken the beasts with them on their trips.

The cowboy accepted Jack's cordial invitation to remain there until they were ready to go on to Nevada.

Having put him in the hands of Tim and Fritz, the young inventor returned to the house and made out his application for a patent on the electric car.

Having mailed it, he made his way to the nearest telegraph station, and notified the authorities of D—— of the crimes that Bob Crow and Martin Dale had committed and asked them to hold the villains if they were caught about the town.

These precautions taken, Jack returned to the shop.

Preparations were then made for the long journey they intended to make, and at the end of a week the Demon was in readiness.

It leaked out that Jack and his friend intended to start from Wrightstown in the electric carriage, and he was besieged by newspaper reporters for a view of the machine and an account of the trip.

The story of the wonderful electrical engine spread like wildfire all over the country, and the fame of its young inventor was increased.

Jack was glad when the day of departure came.

He went aboard of the motor with his friends, they got her machinery in readiness, and mounting to the turret the young inventor grasped the wheel.

In front of him there stood a lever board, by means of which all active parts of the Demon were controlled.

Having pulled one of these levers, Jack completed a circuit between the batteries and the motors, and the wheels began to revolve.

Out of the shop ran the engine, across a broad, smooth path to the fence gate, and thence to the middle of the street.

There were thousands of people swarming the thoroughfare when the Demon of the Plains came flying down the street.

A crowd of men and boys ran after her.

Hats and handkerchiefs were waved to the inmates of the vehicle, and Jack was kept bowing right and left in acknowledgement of the cheers and other manifestations of the people's delight upon seeing the extraordinary invention.

Tim and Charley ran the American flag up on top of the pole, and as its beautiful folds fluttered out to the breeze the cheers became absolutely deafening.

Fritz remained down below, carefully watching the machinery through an open trap in the floor, and the monkey and parrot becoming excited by the tremendous uproar, began to howl and jabber at the top of their voices.

Along the main street of the village dashed the Demon, her speed increasing every time Jack moved the battery lever, until by the time she reached the outskirts her wheels kicked up a big cloud of dust, enveloped in the folds of which she disappeared.

Her course had been very carefully mapped out, and her march across the States toward her destination was signalled by the same scenes of curiosity and excitement wherever civilization was met.

The news of her course had been published broadcast, and there were large crowds of people on foot and in vehicles ready to meet and follow her a ways everywhere she went near cities, towns and hamlets.

She operated even much better than Jack anticipated when she had been in use a couple of weeks, and by the time she reached the State of Nevada a better machine could scarcely have been wished for.

Throughout the trip thus far our friends had met with many interesting incidents, but none so thrilling as one that occurred when they reached the town of Carlin.

A train load of cattle had come in from Arizona, and a number of vaqueros were dispatched from a ranch a few miles from the town to unload and drive the cows back.

The animals were herded into the huge railroad stock corral, and the cowboys rode their mustangs into the town to have a drink.

By the time they had loaded themselves with whisky the shadows of twilight had fallen, and they started back for their camp.

Two of the new hands were seen to loiter behind the rest engaged in a quarrel, when one of them drew a revolver on his friend.

It was just then that the Demon came down the road behind them.

The man with the pistol fired at his companion, and the other leaned over on the opposite side of his mustang, Indian fashion, and began circling around the armed man, at the same time loosening his lasso.

The lassoer kept drawing nearer to his companion, who kept blazing away without hitting horse or rider, and then suddenly sat up.

Whirling his lariat around his head, he flung the line, its noose settling around the armed man's neck. Starting his mustang off at the top of its speed, he jerked the other from his saddle, and went thundering away, dragging the man by the head over the rocks and through the sage brush.

CHAPTER VI.

OVERTAKEN BY JUSTICE.

A cry of horror pealed from Jack's lips upon observing the tragedy being enacted down the road ahead of him, and his friends rushed up from below to ascertain what had startled him.

"Lord save us, has anything happened to ye, lad?" anxiously asked Tim.

"No, no! But see there! Oh, it was terrible—terrible!" cried Jack, as he pointed ahead down the road.

Every one peered out excitedly.

The mustang from which the cowboy had been pulled had gone dashing away over the plains.

Some distance in advance rode the murderous rascal who had lassoed its rider, his mustang plunging along like a whirlwind.

He had secured the end of the lariat to the saddle-horn, and at the other end his friend was caught around the neck by the noose and was being dragged along over the ground as fast as the horse was going.

Every projection from the ground was ripping his clothing to rags, tearing his flesh from his bones, and mutilating him horribly.

The lariat noose choked him so that not a sound escaped his gaping mouth, and caused his eyeballs to bulge from their sockets, contorted his swelled and purple face into a hideous expression.

Both of his arms were convulsively raised to pull that strangling noose from around his neck, but without avail.

Far ahead the rest of the vaqueros were driving the cattle along the trail toward their camp and seeing the wild rider

thundering along toward them, discharging a brace of navy revolvers in the air and yelling like a Commanche Indian; they parted right and left to let him pass, assured that he was running amuck.

It was some moments before our friends in the electric coach recovered from their horror and astonishment.

Then Lasso Charley broke the silence.

"The man must have suddenly gone crazy," he remarked.

"No. It was a case of pure fiendishness," replied Jack.

"How so?" queried Tim, in amazed tones.

"The man being dragged shot at the other, and is being paid off for his temerity in that awful fashion."

"Lieber Gott! Vos dot so?" gasped Fritz incredulously.

"You have my word for it. I saw the whole incident."

"Can't yer overtake ther lubber an' save his wictim's life?" asked Tim.

"I believe I can. At any rate, I'll try."

"If you can get within one hundred feet of him," said Lasso Charley, "I'll show you how I won my name by catching him for you."

"Go ahead," replied the young inventor smilingly.

He put on more electro-motor force, and the carriage rushed ahead across the plain at redoubled speed.

The cowboy went downstairs and took a long, thin lariat from the storeroom, and mounted to the roof of the Demon.

Along rushed the motor in the gathering twilight, and when the vaqueros saw her coming they scattered in alarm.

The searchlight was then turned on.

The blazing glow shot a mile ahead of the Demon, and scared the cattle so that they stampeded, much to the annoyance of the cowboys, as they were obliged to round them up again.

On flew the electric motor, and passing the vaqueros and their rampaging cattle, she continued in pursuit of the murderer.

He saw the glaring searchlight blazing around him, and looking back over his shoulder uttered a smothered cry of alarm.

Whether he recognized then what it was or not is quite uncertain, but he observed that the dreadful object was in hot pursuit of himself, and he lashed his mustang furiously, and jabbed the rowels of his long Mexican spurs into its flanks until they bled.

Wild-eyed, panting and snorting, the mustang sped along with flying mane and tail, and the cowboy sent several shots flying back at the Demon as he leaned in the saddle.

Slowly but surely the electrical engine bore down upon the rascal, and foreseeing that he must soon be overtaken, the man had wit enough to cut his lariat.

The awful dragging of his victim ceased when the line was severed, and unimpeded by the extra weight the mustang shot ahead, making much faster progress.

As soon as Jack saw what the cowboy did, he switched off the current from the wheel motors, and put on the air-brakes.

"We must pause and examine the poor wretch," he remarked to his companions. "He may not be dead. We may save his life yet."

"Aye, but that 'ere land shark will escape," remonstrated Tim.

"I think not. His mustang must be half exhausted from the furious gait at which he has been driving it. Besides, at the rate of speed we can travel, it won't be long ere we can overtake him."

The motor came to a pause within a few feet of the prostrate cowboy, and Jack ran downstairs, took a bottle of liquor from the table, and opening one of the side doors, he alighted.

Running up to the cowboy, he knelt beside him, and loosened the noose from about his throat.

The man was all torn to pieces.

His face and hands were frightfully lacerated, and presented an appalling spectacle, as he was on his back, stentoriously gasping for breath.

Jack tried to revive him as he would a drowning person, and, forcing some liquor down his throat, partially resuscitated him.

He was too far gone to live long, however.

Wondering who he was, the young inventor raised his head so the light would fall upon his mutilated features.

No sooner had he done so when he received a shock of surprise.

"It is Bob Crow!" he exclaimed, in startled tones.

There could be no doubt about it; he was the innkeeper's wicked son who had once made an attempt to rob and kill him.

He was the same thin, haggard, long-haired young man with the fierce, sunken eyes, and close-cut, bristly-red mustache.

Intact as the features were, they now looked frightful.

A deep moan of pain emanated from his bleeding lips, and he opened his now sightless eyes, and gasped hoarsely:

"I'm a dead man."

"Who did this?" asked Jack compassionately.

All the resentment he once felt against his enemy was instantly banished by the pitiful aspect of misery he now presented, for Jack had a big, generous heart, and a very forgiving disposition.

The dying man gasped and choked as he essayed to speak, but a sudden fit of faintness overwhelming him, he uttered a hollow groan, and fell back limp and inanimate on Jack's arm.

The young inventor set himself assiduously to work to revive him again.

In this effort he finally succeeded, and then shouted sharply:

"Tell me who did this?"

"Martin Dale," came the feeble reply.

"Swallow some more of this liquor."

"No, no! Avenge my death. He robbed me of the papers that——"

Those were the last words he ever uttered.

He drew a long breath, and when he respired the death rattle sounded in his throat, his eyes opened wide, his jaw fell, and he stiffened out his body and limbs.

"Dead!" muttered Jack.

He laid the unfortunate man down.

His friends stood grouped in back of him.

"Gone?" asked Tim.

"Forever," was the sad reply.

"Who was he?" queried the cowboy.

"Bob Crow, our old enemy."

"Wot?"

"What?"

"Vot?"

With these three astonished exclamations, the rest bent over the body, staring down at it in the utmost amazement.

"Martin Dale killed him!" continued Jack.

"Wot!"

"What!"

"Vot!"

More and more were the trio astonished.

They turned from the dead man to Jack, thoroughly amazed.

"That's what he just told me."

It was some time before the others recovered themselves.

The news had come so suddenly as to intensely shock them.

"Waal, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated Tim at last.

"So dem tuyfels vos got here ahel ohf us, eh?" gasped Fritz.

"Why did Martin Dale commit this crime?" asked Lasso Charley.

"I do not know. They were quarreling, though, when I first saw them. The last words Crow uttered were: 'He robbed me of the papers that——' and here he was choked off from finishing the sentence by the grim hand of death."

"He was robbed of papers by his friend and accomplice, eh?" said the cowboy. "What papers were they?"

"He had no time to state."

"Could they have been the documents of which I was robbed at the inn, showing the location of my gold claim, and giving me the title to work it?" asked Lasso Charley, in eager, anxious tones.

"They might have been. We can find out."

"How?"

"By searching the corpse."

The job was a repulsive one, but the cowboy did it.

Nothing rewarded him, however, and he looked up, and said:

"He hasn't got them."

"Perhaps they are in his kit at the camp?"

"We had better find out."

"If they ain't, you can depend that Dale has got them."

The rest assented to this, and procuring a spade from the motor, they made an opening in the ground, and laid the corpse in it.

The big, blood-red moon now slowly arose on the edge of the plain, and cast a weird glow over the solemn scene.

Our friends left the lonely mound and returned to the motor.

"Now, then, to overhaul the murderer swiftly," cried Jack. Jack.

Martin Dale and his mustang had disappeared from view in the far distance, riding like the wind.

But he left a plain trail behind him.

And away rushed the Demon, the young inventor trailing the fugitive by the now silvery moonlight.

CHAPTER VII.

IN A BED OF FIRE.

The territory over which the Demon was rushing teemed with innumerable coyotes, badgers and rabbits.

It was one of the strangest sections of the United States.

In past ages, by an upheaval of the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains, the territory inclosed a vast sea, the drainage and evaporation of which had left an enormous plateau behind.

The surface of the country presented a barren, rocky and mountainous aspect, with very little timber land, save the cottonwoods found along the rivers, and the pinon, cedar, and mountain mahogany on the uplands.

The river system in which Lasso Charley had made his great discovery of gold was very peculiar, most all the streams either sinking into the sandy deserts or emptying into sinks or lakes that had no outlets.

Hot springs abounded in various places, and the air was very dry; antelope, elk, deer, black and grizzly bears were to be found in abundance, and numerous cattle ranches were scattered over the sage brush valleys, in which the bunch grass and cactus were found.

The mineral wealth of the place was extraordinary, the gold and silver mines there being the richest in the world.

Jack was not at all acquainted with the territory save knowing what Lasso Charley had told him, and such stories as he heard of the depraved Digger and Shoshone Indians.

He had no trouble in pursuing the trail of the cowboy when the moon added its luster to the gleam of the searchlight, and found that it was directing him toward 12-Mile Canyon in the Diamond range.

"They lubber must a-rode like fury ter keep out o' our sight so long," said Tim, after a while. "I don't see no sign o' him."

"Oh, we will overhaul him in time," said Jack in resolute tones. "You must not forget that he had a long start of us."

"How fast ve vos dravelin'?" asked Fritz.

"Forty miles an hour," replied Jack, looking at one of the registers.

"Good heavens! we are going like an express train!" said Lasso Charley on the roof. "It's lucky this is a pretty smooth valley. If we were to run into a rock going at this rate of speed, Heaven help us."

Jack kept his glance riveted on the dial.

An uneasy expression began to steal over his face.

His friends soon observed the marked attention he paid the dial.

"Anydings der medder?" asked Fritz.

"Yes, we are losing speed," replied Jack.

"Wot from?" hastily asked the old sailor.

"The storage batteries are becoming exhausted from constant use."

"But we can recharge them with the dynamo," said the cowboy.

"Not now. It would take just seven hours to fill them. In that time we would lose our man altogether."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Keep right on until they are played out."

"But if we have not reached him yet?"

"Then I'll couple the dynamo to the wheel motors."

"Hooray!" roared Tim. "Did yer ever see sich a lad fer resources?"

The coach kept slackening speed rapidly now, and within half an hour suddenly came to a pause, and the cowboy went inside.

Jack did not waste a moment.

He ran downstairs and started the oil engine.

As soon as it was buzzing, he connected it with the dynamo, and a shower of snapping sparks flew from the copper brushes. Loosening the transmitting wires from the storage batteries, he carried them to the switchboard, which was connected with binding-posts of the dynamo, and the cut-out up in the turret.

The current thus generated was ready for use in a few moments, and Jack returned to the turret and seized the lever to close the cut-out.

One turn and it sent the current to the wheels, and away ran the engine again, at a slower pace than before.

The dynamo was so small that it was impossible to get the amount of electro-motive force from it in bulk that came from the large series of jars.

Consequently the Demon only went half as fast as she had been going, and thereby lost much valuable time.

However, she soon reached the tracks of the Southern Pacific railroad, and there they saw their man.

His mustang must have become exhausted, stumbled, and fell with him.

It received such fatal injuries that it died in the gully beside the track where it had fallen, while its rider, having landed on his head, had been knocked senseless.

Recovering just before the Demon appeared, he was about to run away, when a shout from our friends attested to the fact that they saw him, whereupon he dropped down behind the carcass of his horse, and drew his reloaded pistols.

From this breastwork he began to open fire upon the coach, and as the bullets began to hum like bees around him, Jack quickly drew up a strong wire screen over the windows.

It was bullet-proof netting, for every time a whistling ball struck it, instead of piercing it, it rebounded harmlessly.

Jack brought the Demon to a pause.

"Man the loop-holes!" he exclaimed to his friends.

They all descended the stairs.

Each window was protected by wire screens.

In the center were the loop-holes Jack mentioned.

His three companions protruded the barrels of three pneumatic rifles from these apertures.

The fugitive became desperate when he saw this formidable battery.

"Now, then," shouted Jack, "give in, Martin Dale?"

"Never!" yelled the man behind the horse defiantly.

"Fire!" shouted Jack to his friends.

Three bullets were discharged at the desperate rascal, and although he was screened by the corpse of the horse, against which the bullets struck with violent effect, they heard him yell.

He then bounded upon his feet, staggered back, clapped his hand to his head, and fell heavily to the ground.

"He's hit!" cried Jack.

"That settles the lubber," said Tim delightedly.

They all left the motor and approached Dale.

He had only been momentarily stunned, however, for he was upon his feet again like a cat a moment afterward.

Jack and his companions were around the man, and never expected such a move as this, for he startled them.

Before they realized what he was up to, he had dashed past them, and just as they aimed their weapons to bring him down, with one agile bound he landed inside of the Demon.

The bullets intended for him struck the coach harmlessly and the astute rascal slammed the door shut, and secured it on the inside.

"Go for the shelter of yonder rocks, boys!" cried Lasso Charley.

There was a mass of rocks and sand a short distance away, and they lost no time in getting behind them out of gunshot range.

Nor had they gone any too soon.

For a moment afterward Dale appeared in the turret.

"Come on!" he yelled hoarsely. "Why don't you show yourselves? Who's got the best of the situation now? Come on, I say."

"He is very brave, now that he is safe," said Jack sarcastically.

"We're in a nice fix now!" groaned Tim.

"How are we to get him out of there?" blankly asked the cowboy.

"Ve might build a fires unter der modor," suggested Fritz. "Id don't vould hurt her, but he couldn'd stood der heat long."

This was an excellent plan, and met with general approval.

"How do you suppose those two rascals happened to join the ranch they were working for as cowboys?" asked Lasso Charley.

"Possibly to hide their identities in the wilds, in order to escape the detectives who were looking for them for the crimes they have both committed in the East," replied Jack.

"Besides that, by joining the vaqueros of this ranch they would be better able to surround themselves with a number of kindred spirits, necessary to their project of seizing your

mine and holding it against any invasion you might contemplate making."

Jack had surmised a correct explanation of the matter.

They began to discuss the desperate situation they were in, and finally came to the conclusion that the Dutchman's idea could be carried out.

"I hope he won't discover how to start the machine going," said Jack in anxious tones. "If he does, we may lose her entirely."

"Den let us lost no time in gatherin' all ouf der sage brush ve can," replied Fritz practically, "und roast him oud before he could done dot. Ve soon vin her beck again."

"Couldn't he fire upon us when we approach her?" queried the cowboy.

"Not if he don't discover the use of the pneumatic gun, and we approach the rear of the carriage, where there is no window," said Jack.

"Scatter, then!" cried Tim energetically.

They made off in different directions, taking great care to keep safe from a possible bombardment.

It was an easy matter for them to gather a large quantity of the sage brush, and by approaching the rear of the coach they managed to pile a huge heap of it under and all around her.

In the meantime Dale had gone down in the lower rooms, and watching the movements kept up a constant fusillade against them with his big navy revolvers.

Once he ventured to thrust his arm out one of the loopholes to turn it around and fire at Fritz, who was approaching the rear with his arms full of the dry sage brush.

Before he could fire Tim discharged a bullet at him, inflicting a wound on his hand, and causing him to cry out and hastily withdraw his arm out of danger.

He kept on firing at our friends after that, every time he thought he had a chance to hit them, but failed to do so.

In a short time they had a sufficient quantity of the inflammable material heaped around the Demon.

Then Jack struck a match and ignited it.

A roaring mass of flames shot up all around the motor as the young inventor ran back behind the rocks, and in a moment more nothing was to be seen of the Demon owing to the fiery envelop by which she was surrounded.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE CATTLE RANCH.

The blaze had scarcely got well under way when the shriek of a locomotive whistle was heard in the distance, and an east-bound train came flying toward the spot where the fire was raging.

It slowed up when it drew close to the fire which burned near the railroad track, and the conductors and brakemen could be seen standing on the car steps looking ahead.

By the time the train reached the spot opposite the motor it had come to a standstill, and a conductor alighted and hastened over to the motor to see what the reason of the fire was.

Jack and his companions were on the other side of the Demon, and dared not approach the train, as Martin Dale could have killed them one by one the moment they appeared.

He owed Jack a grudge for the harsh treatment he had received in Wrightstown, and being a very vindictive man, it was likely that he would not stop at any means to gain vengeance.

The conductor saw that there was no danger to be apprehended for the train, and as he was already behind time,

he ran to the cars and signaled the engineer with his lantern to go ahead.

A clang of the bell followed, and the cars started.

As the passengers glanced out of the window in wonder at the fire, they were startled to see a man spring from the midst of the flames.

Martin Dale had found his quarters becoming unbearably hot, and seeing a chance to escape, unhesitatingly took advantage of it.

He kept the fire between himself and Jack's party, and as the train moved along he ran around the end of the last car, then made a rush for the front platform.

It was easy enough for him to get on unseen, as the cars screened his body from the view of our friends, and the train soon gathered headway, and swiftly bore the rascal far away out of danger.

The sage brush around the Demon soon burned up.

Not a sound came from the interior but the yells of the monkey and parrot, who were suffering from the heat.

When the fire consumed itself, Jack exclaimed:

"It's mighty queer we have heard nothing of Dale yet."

"Let's surround the motor, fire at her, an' make ther lubber show hisself," suggested Tim, taking a fresh chew of tobacco.

"Very well. You and Charley stay here. Fritz and I will go around to the other side of her," replied Jack, nodding.

With this understanding, they separated.

The inventor and the fat fellow made a wide circuit.

Scarcely, however, had they reached the other side of the Demon when they saw the side door standing wide open.

Jack was startled.

"The bird has flown!" he cried.

"Vot—gone?" blankly asked Fritz.

"Why would he leave the door open?"

"Vell, where he could gone ter?"

"That's a mystery to me. Let's board her."

"Dot vos risky; he may be on board yet."

"I'll venture it," said Jack.

He boldly approached the carriage.

As no one attempted to molest him, he gained courage.

Reaching the door, he went in.

As he suspected, he found that Dale was gone.

The interior was stifling, and to relieve the suffering of the parrot and monkey, he drove the motor some distance away from the hot ground, and alighted with the two cages.

"Hey, Shack!" yelled the Dutchman.

"What do you want?" replied the young inventor.

He saw Fritz kneeling on the ground opposite the spot where the motor had been standing, and approached him.

"Dale vos left a trail here."

"A trail?"

"Yah! A trail of blood."

"Is that so? Where does it lead to?"

"I see me dot puddy gwick."

And so saying Fritz crept away with his face close to the ground, scanning a track of bloodstains which Dale had left behind from the wounds he had received.

The track led Fritz to the railroad rails, crossed them, turned eastward for some distance, curved toward the tracks again, and then abruptly disappeared from view.

Jack followed the Dutchman.

As soon as he observed the course taken by the trail he jumped at a correct solution of the mystery of Dale's disappearance.

"I see through it," he exclaimed vehemently. "He left the coach on the side furthest removed from us while the train stood here, crossed around to the other side of it keeping his movements screened from view by the cars and finally boarded them here."

"I tink so nelder," assented Fritz.

Tim and the cowboy came up to learn why they did not fire at the coach.

They were told the news, and were rendered wild.

"We will never catch him now," cried Lasso Charley bitterly.

"The train can reach the next station long before we can," Jack assented, "but I think we might have him held."

"How can we?" eagerly asked the cowboy.

"What is the name of the first station the train will reach?"

"I think it is Elko."

"Good! Fritz, bring me the little mahogany box from the store room and two pairs of nippers as quick as you can."

The Dutchman hastened aboard of the motor.

In a few minutes he returned with the articles asked for, and leaving the box on the ground, Jack put the nippers in his pocket and climbed up the nearest telegraph pole.

Here he cut the wire.

Then he slid down to the ground again.

"Ah! You are going to tap the wire?" said Lasso Charley.

"That is just my plan," assented Jack.

He opened the mahogany box, displaying a telegraphic key, sounder and cut-out, to which he fastened the several ends of the telegraph wire.

Instantly the sounder began to click, and he let it rattle on until the message then passing was completed.

Cutting the wire had interrupted it.

The message was repeated.

Then there was a pause, and Jack cut in on the wire with his key, as he was familiar with the Morse alphabet.

He called up Elko.

Then he telegraphed the operator what had happened.

This done, he continued:

"Hold wounded man on train; he is a murderer."

A moment afterward he received the reply:

"Will notify police."

"We will await your reply," answered Jack.

"Don't fail to repair wire when done."

"I will attend to it."

It required only half an hour to get the result.

The train reached Elko.

Then the instrument began to rapidly click.

Jack read the message aloud to his friends.

"Train arrived. Posse of police boarding her."

"If caught, we will come on to convict the criminal," telegraphed Jack.

An interval of silence lasting five minutes ensued.

Then the sounder began to sharply rattle again:

"Man not on board the train."

"Has he escaped?"

"Conductor let him off at way station of Moleen."

"Confound it! Didn't he suspect foul play?"

"Man told him he had been attacked by outlaws, and was shot."

That settled it.

Jack was thoroughly disgusted.

The artful Dale had deceived the trainmen.

Now he was entirely out of the reach of our friends.

Thanking the operator, Jack uncoupled his instrument from the wire and repaired it, after which he told his friends the news.

"We can do nothing more now," said he. "If Dale has got your papers, Charley, he will keep them. There is a slight chance of them being among Bob Crow's effects, or even Dale's effects at the cattle ranch. We had better run back among the cowboys and ascertain. All aboard the Demon."

The electric machine had cooled off by this time, and they

got aboard of her, and she started off again, the parrot yelling:

"Fire—fire—fire! Cracker! Pretty Poll!"

Jack steered the motor in the direction of the place where they had last seen the vaqueros driving the cattle from Carlin.

An examination of the motor showed that she had not suffered any damage from the fire or at the hands of Martin Dale.

In due time she reached the place where the cattlemen had last been seen, and striking their trail Jack followed it up.

They reached the ranch about midnight.

The superintendent came out to meet them, and when Jack had explained what the motor was, and detailed his business, he looked very much astonished.

"I picked them there two pilgrims up in Carlin a few days ago," said he, "an' as they was powerful hard up for work, I engaged them to help the boys. They both brung valises, an' I've got 'em in the ranch."

"Will you allow me to examine them?" asked Jack.

"Certainly I will, stranger. Come along to the roost."

He rode on the motor to the low, rambling house, and expressed himself as being highly pleased with the Demon's actions.

Jack followed him into the building.

He soon brought in two valises and sat them on the floor.

"They ain't locked," said he. "Go ahead."

Jack needed no second invitation.

He opened the bags, and scattering the contents on the floor, he was soon busily engaged rummaging their contents.

But the papers he sought for were not there.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING A BRONCHIO.

A feeling of intense disappointment took possession of Jack when he found that their journey had been in vain.

He thanked the superintendent for his kindness, and with the conviction that Martin Dale had the stolen papers with him, he returned to the interior of the Demon and told his friends the bad news.

"We had better start off to-morrow for the mine," said Jack in conclusion. "Dale may have the papers, but you can seize your claim and secure it again, Charley. Everything depends upon us getting there first. It's of no use wasting time looking for Dale now."

"Dot vos so," Fritz soberly assented.

They turned in for the night, keeping watch and watch in turn.

In the meantime the jars were recharged by the dynamo.

The following morning dawned gloomy and rain threatening, and they were roused by the lowing and bellowing of the cattle in the corrals.

Fritz cooked a savory breakfast.

When they had finished the meal, Jack ascended to the turret and glancing out of the window observed a scene of great activity going on.

The drove of cattle that came in the night before were being driven from the stockyard as fast as they were branded, and the cowboys, mounted on wild and wiry little bronchos, were driving them away to the pastures of the range that extended to a distance of from thirty to forty miles.

It was necessary to keep them on the move in order to feed good all day, as the herbage was none of the best here.

"Well, pard, are you off?" called the superintendent from the house door.

"Yes; we may have our claim jumped if we don't get there before Martin Dale reaches the place," replied Jack.

"Good luck to you, then."

"Should Dale return to camp," said Jack, "do not forget that he murdered his friend to gain this gold."

"Thar isn't a lariat on the ranch what wouldn't be tightened around his cussed neck the minute he shows his nose here," replied the superintendent, with an angry frown.

And as Jack sent the motor speeding away through the valley he read in that ominous look on the man's face a stern resolve to make short-work of the murderer if he appeared.

Lasso Charley came up into the turret a few minutes afterwards, and Jack turned to him, and said:

"You are the very chap I want."

"Well, what is it?" asked the cowboy.

"Can you give explicit directions how to reach the mine?"

"Of course. You have only got to head southward through Eureka County, cross the Dry Valley in Nye, and go for the Hot Creek range. Following the foothills down into Ralston Desert you will come to a lonely peak called Black Mountain. From there your course will be southeast across the Lava Fields of the Wawich Valley. Passing Sand Hill Peak on the east of Bare Mountain range, we will strike the border. Here the Armagosa Creek runs along the edge of the Great Desert, and finally sinks into the sand near the boiling springs of Death Valley. It is there we will find the Armagosa mine, as I named it."

With a map of the State in front of him, it was an easy matter for Jack to follow the course the cowboy laid out, tracing it with a pencil.

It soon began to rain, and as the engine sped along, Jack suddenly caught sight of a band of mounted cowboys ahead.

They were riding like the wind after a big broncho.

Upon this stallion's back there sat a boy of about fourteen, clad in a buckskin suit.

He was clinging desperately to the broncho's mane.

It was very evident that the beast was a wild one, which the daring boy had been breaking, and it managed to get away with him.

Now the beast was plunging ahead like the wind.

None of the pursuing mustangs could catch it, although the cowboys were magnificent riders, and urged their steeds on to the top bent of their speed.

Along they sped in an effort to save the boy from the runaway broncho, and their yells and the pounding hoofs of their mounts lent additional terror to the wild horse.

It is a well-known fact that there never was known to exist a tame horse capable of running as fast as a wild one.

Moreover the weight of the men was so much greater than that of the boy that their mounts were greatly handicapped.

"There's a runaway, Charley," exclaimed Jack.

"Thunder! How that youngster can ride."

"And the cowboys chasing him can't overtake the broncho."

"That's as plain as day."

"Going to try?"

"Of course. The beast may throw the boy and kill him."

And Jack drew the lever of the storage batteries over, for they had been recharged during the night, and the armatures fairly buzzed.

Away shot the motor like the wind.

A mass of mud flew up at her wheels, and she swiftly bore down upon the flying cowboys.

"I was disappointed in showing you how I won my name by the death of Martin Dale's mount last night," said the cowboy to Jack, as he picked up his coiled lasso, "but you'll

have a chance to see it now, if you get near enough to that stallion."

"Going to lasso the brute?"

"I am, and I want you to see me do it."

He was proud of his ability at this work, and Jack noticed it.

Lasso Charley went out on the roof again, and a few moments afterwards the coach ranged up behind the cowboys.

"Clear the way, there!" screamed Jack.

"Lord! What is it?" roared the vaqueros, looking back in dismay, and swerving their mustangs to the right and left.

"I'll save the boy!" shouted Jack, as he swept past.

Then on the Demon flew like a thunderbolt.

"Save me—save me!" he heard the boy scream.

The broncho was fairly skimming over the ground, and the boy was riding like a veteran, although his mount had on no saddle or bridle.

The approach of the coach seemed to terrify the animal more than the chasing cowboys did, and it made mighty efforts to get away.

Quarter of a mile further, and the Demon ranged up to within eighty feet of the broncho, and the boy looked back.

He was astonished at the appearance of the machine.

Indeed, coming so suddenly upon him, he was scared at it.

"Hang on, there, boy!" roared the cowboy.

"Jerusalem! What are you doing?" gasped the little fellow.

"Going to round up that bucker."

"Hurry! I can't hold him."

Charley coiled up his lasso.

Whirling it around his head, he let it fly.

The loops uncoiled as the sinuous line shot through the air.

The noose was aimed with wonderful skill, for it dropped down over the horse's head and encircled its neck.

A jerk at the line tightened it.

Charley took a turn around the forks of a cleat with the end of the line, and a cheer from Jack, Tim and Fritz greeted his exploit.

"Stop the Demon!" he yelled.

Jack cut out the current. Then he applied the air-brake. The engine suddenly paused.

"Hang on, youngster!" roared the cowboy.

As the Demon stopped and the broncho kept on running, the lariat became as taut as a fiddle string.

It shut off the broncho's wind and sent the beast up on its haunches, wild-eyed and pawing the air.

Recovering itself, it began to rear, plunge and kick.

The boy hung on with all his strength, for the violent actions of the beast several times nearly dismounted him.

But the beast could not get away.

A hoarse, snorting sound escaped it as the noose tightened around its windpipe with every plunge it made, and finally, as it made a frantic and powerful effort to break loose, it was flung down.

The boy alighted on his feet like a cat.

"Hurrah!" he shouted excitedly. "Now I've got him. Loosen your lariat, stranger, and I'll tame him yet! Hurry up!"

"Bless him, he's full of pluck!" chuckled the cowboy, complying.

As soon as the boy had all the line, he dexterously slipped the noose into the broncho's mouth and up behind its ears.

Running the line down into its mouth again to extemporize a bit he allowed the animal to struggle to its hoofs.

With sublime courage he then vaulted upon its back.

The brute was shaking like an aspen.

The boy dealt it a stinging cut with the end of the line then, and speaking sharply to it, the beast galloped off.

It then suddenly stopped, and bucked.

Its backbone went up in an arch, but the boy was ready for it.

He clung to its back like grim death, and it failed to throw him.

Then he began to fight it.

The broncho dashed ahead and jumped in the air, all four hoofs leaving the ground in a bunch as it humped up its back again.

It seemed as if the boy was glued to the beast, so well did he keep his seat.

Failing to dislodge him in this manner the stallion resorted to several other astute tricks with no better success.

All through its maneuvers the little chap's voice could be heard addressing the animal in firm tones, and then he began to thrash it.

He had no mercy on the beast.

He must gain the supremacy now or fail to break its will.

The astonished animal fought gamely against him, but it soon began to realize that it was under the control of a master hand.

Up around the boy trooped the vaqueros, and watched the struggle with the most absorbed interest.

Jack and his companions were equally interested.

It soon proved to be of no use to fight against that plucky youngster and the fiery beast finally succumbed.

It stood as docile as a mule.

The boy had conquered it.

And a wild yell of delight escaped the cowboys.

CHAPTER X.

MIRING THE STEERS.

Waving his sombrero triumphantly in the air, the plucky boy drove the subdued broncho up to the Demon of the Plains, and bringing the beast to a pause in front of the machine, he shouted laughingly:

"There! Thanks to you, I've broken his spirit, and saved my neck."

"You deserve credit for your nerve," laughed Jack.

"Oh, I'm used to this. I've caught several bronchos this way."

"Live near here?"

"Why, senor," said a half-breed Mexican vaquero, "he is the son of the superintendent who runs the Mariposa ranch where you stopped last night."

"Is that so? Well, I'm glad we have been able to repay his father for the kindness he did us."

The boy questioned Jack closely about the motor.

He longed to go with our friends, but sighed and dared not ask for the coveted privilege, as he was needed at the ranch to herd cattle.

After some further conversation he thanked Jack and his friends, and the cowboys closed in around him, and he drove the wild broncho at breakneck speed back for the ranch.

Jack continued his journey.

The youngster and the cowboys soon were lost to view.

Late in the afternoon our friends reached Dry Valley, at a point midway between Harrold's Ranch and Stoneberger Creek when Tim, who held the wheel, was startled to hear the parrot yell:

"Oh, what a lark! Oh, what a lark!"

"Cork up yer jawin' tackle, thar'" growled the old sailor.

"Rats!" replied the bird impudently.

"D'yer want me ter mount yer foreriggin' wi' my walkin' gear?"

"Look at them! Look there, you chump!" the bird went on.

He stood on the window sill, and had his head cocked on one side, much as if he were intently studying something with his red eye.

Tim observed this action.

It aroused his curiosity.

He shot a glance in the direction the bird was looking and to his surprise he observed that there was a method in the bird's remarks.

Off to the westward, toward the creek, he saw a dark, moving body.

Clapping a binocular to his eye, Tim intently studied it, and saw that it was a large drove of cattle.

They were racing away across the valley at a furious pace, their heads lowered until their horns almost grazed the ground.

A short distance in back of them came a band of mounted Indians, who, with shouts, whips and ponies, were driving the herd ahead.

Well knowing that the Diggers were not herdsmen, the first natural inference Tim had was that they were stealing the cattle.

Nor was he mistaken.

They were evidently robbing some ranch.

"All han's on deck! Tumble up! Come aloft!" roared Tim.

Jack and the rest were eating their supper.

Startled by the old sailor's yells, they ran up to the turret.

"What has happened?" asked Jack breathlessly.

"Thar's a band o' red thieves," said Tim, pointing at the Indians.

Jack viewed them with the glass.

Over fifty Indians were in the party.

"We must stop that work," said the young inventor decisively.

"Shiminey Christmas, vot ve kin do mit dot bick growd?" asked Fritz.

"What have we got that pneumatic gun for?"

"Gee whiz! Be yer goin' ter use it on 'em?" asked Tim.

"Yes. In order to prevent that herd of cattle, in which there must be over 200 head, running wild. I'm going to mire them in that creek. In the meantime, we must keep the savages back by means of our gun at long range."

"I tink so neider," said Fritz.

"Tim, let me manage the wheel."

"Aye, aye, my lad!"

"Then you may go back to the gun."

The old sailor relinquished control.

Jack thereupon steered the motor toward the flying cattle.

Mounting the small, revolving turret, Tim opened a small trap in its roof, and then pulled a lever on the wall, which started the air-pump, filling the reservoirs of the gun with atmosphere at a tremendous pressure.

This done, he thrust a long, brass cartridge-shaped projectile into the breech of the weapon, locked it, and turned the turret until the weapon was brought to bear upon the savages.

"How far off is they?" he yelled to Jack.

"Three miles," replied the young inventor.

"Shall I drop 'em a shot?"

"Have you got your gun ready?"

"Aye, aye!" replied Tim.

"Then plant a shell in front of them."

The old sailor discharged the weapon by pressing a button

It released the confined air, and the projectile was blown from the weapon with a loud swish and terrific force.

Away it bowled, describing a graceful curve in the air, and in a few moments it landed in front of the Indians.

There it exploded.

A thunderous report rang out.

The earth fairly trembled.

Within that shell was confined a high explosive of far greater strength than dynamite or gun cotton.

It sent a cloud of dirt up before the Indians' ponies, and drawing wild howls from the savages brought them to a pause.

Many flying particles of the burst shell struck them, inflicting painful wounds, the cloud of dirt blinded and stung them, and they were thrown into a veritable panic.

Their ponies scattered.

Along sped the coach to head off the steers.

"Tim, give them another shot."

"Aye, aye! I'll drop ther hull crew."

"Shoot their horses from under them."

"Wot for?"

"So they can't escape."

"Why hold 'em?"

"I see a band of ranchmen coming."

"The owners of ther cattle?"

"Drovers, apparently."

Tim reloaded the gun.

He then depressed the muzzle.

A moment afterwards another shot was fired.

It flew among the wiry little ponies and burst.

The carnage it created was simply terrific.

Down went a dozen of the mustangs that were in its way.

A passage was cut through the ranks of the band as if by a knife.

A chorus of terrible shouts accompanied the slaughter, for while many of the ponies were killed and wounded, their riders were hurt, flung to the ground and several killed.

The rest became terrified at the awful gun.

Seeing the band of cowboys coming on in back, the creek to the west, and the Demon of the Plains to the south, they wheeled their horses around and dashed away to the eastward.

Along they rode like madmen toward the Hot Creek Mountains.

Several of the cowboys were seen to leave the main body and ride after them like the wind, armed with Winchesters.

Jack saw that the dismounted Diggers would not escape the oncoming men, and shouted to Tim:

"Give the mounted reds another shot."

"I can't!" replied Tim in disgusted tones.

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Because there isn't another shell loaded."

"Prepare some."

"All right; but I can't git 'em ready afore they'll escape."

"You may need them for something else."

While Tim was carrying out Jack's order, the Demon was bearing down upon the cattle like a tornado.

The young inventor started her some distance ahead of the goaded beasts, and turning her around started the searchlight.

Then he charged at them.

Filled with terror by the blazing light, the animals swerved and half of them rushed for the creek uttering deep bellows.

Having got half of them started in the right direction and knowing that they were so frightened that they would plunge straight ahead until they ran into the water, Jack let them run.

Then he turned the engine.

It was necessary now to round up the rest of the herd.

The Demon flew around them, and they became bunched in the creek.

This he finally managed to do after a great deal of difficulty by repeatedly charging upon them from all directions.

They could not withstand the glare of the searchlight blazing in their eyes, and the demoniacal appearance of the machine as it went plunging at them right and left.

Once Jack had turned the stampede in the direction of the stream he let them run and glanced at the first batch.

They had reached the creek and plunged in.

Here their cloven hoofs sunk in the thick, clinging mud.

They struggled fiercely to get out again, but as they were too much frightened to return to the shore where they had gone in, they were stuck.

Soon the entire bellowing herd were caught in the trap.

A furious uproar ensued among them.

Above the din arose the yells of the cattle thieving Indians.

The pursuing cowboys had reached the dismounted crowd, and they were blazing away at each other furiously.

Having no steeds, the savages were placed at a disadvantage, and the cowboys' mustangs circled around and around them.

Half the Indians fell, and the rest fought ferociously, headed by their ugly chief.

Forming a circle around them, the cowboys charged on the desperate crew, and one last, fierce struggle ensued.

Out of the whole crowd of wounded redskins only the chief lived.

He was finally overpowered, bound hand and foot, and dragged to a tree.

Here a noosed rope was put around his neck, the other end was flung over a branch, the avenging vaqueros gave it a pull, and the Indian was hung until he died.

It was rude but stern justice for cattle stealing.

CHAPTER XI.

LEFT BEHIND.

"Say, thar, pard, ye hev saved us a power o' trouble, an' we're obleeged to yer?" shouted the leader of the gang of cowboys to Jack.

The Demon had now run over to the place of execution.

"We saved your cattle from a bad stampede, anyway," said Jack.

"Gosh, ye hev that, an' it couldn't been done better, nohow, by a gang o' Texan greasers. I reckon we kin onhook 'em easy enough."

It was a common occurrence for the cattle to get mired along the streams where they browsed the luxuriant herbage.

"Perhaps we can help you," suggested Jack.

"We'd be glad if yer would, bein' as there's a pretty good head o' steers here."

"Charley, will you ring their horns with your lasso?"

"Of course I will," replied the cowboy. "I've often done it."

"We'll make the engine do our pulling."

Charley went out on the roof again with his lariat.

Within a few minutes a singular but frequently occurring scene was enacted.

The cowboys drove their mustangs to the bank of the creek, and began to lasso the horns of the mired animals.

The ends of their lariats were tied to the saddle post.

As soon as one of the steers were thus caught, the ponies were driven back and the cattle absolutely pulled out of the mud.

All their panic was dissipated, and as soon as they were liberated from the tenacious clutch of the mire, they remained tractable enough to be driven back to the ranch they were stolen from.

Lasso Charley did his work skillfully, and the Demon pulled the cattle out so fast that she alone did half the work.

Finally the whole herd was liberated.

The cowboys then heartily thanked our friends, for by miring the beasts they had saved a great loss and immense amount of work.

"We'll leave that dead Injun thar as a warnin' ter ther rest o' his kind not ter steal other people's property," said the leader of the cowboys, pointing at the swaying corpse. "Like enough ther buzzards an' coyotes 'll pick his skeleton dry, but that'll be buryin' good enough for such carrion."

They then took leave of Jack and his companions, and drove the steers away to the northward, while the Demon went on to the southward and finally left them out of sight.

"They made short work of those Diggers," said Charley grimly.

"Lor! That ain't nuthin' ter wot I once did ter a tribe o' cannibals wot tried ter eat one o' my messmates," said Tim.

"Cannibals going to eat a man?" echoed Charley, in surprise.

"Aye, aye! Didn't I ever tell yer about it?" asked Tim, in surprise.

"Why, no. What was it?"

"It happened this way," replied the old sailor reflectively. "We wuz cruisin' off ther islan' o' Hunga-Hoabai in ther Friendly Group, one arternoon, when I seen a human skull perched on top o' a pole, standin' among ther bushes on shore, an' ast permission ter go ashore to examine it. Ther commander consented, an' me an' Jim Riley landed in a boat. Waal, sir, ther minute we got up ter that 'ere grinnin' skull, wot should it do but open its mouth an' grab Jim by ther nose with its teeth."

"How could a mere skull act that way?"

"Belay, thar, a minute, sir—I'll explain. It worked by a arrangement o' springs an' mechanism wot them 'ere cannibals arranged. Waal, sir, poor Jim hollered like blazes, an' I upped wi' my gun ter fetch ther skull a crack ter make it le' go, when out o' ther bushes sprung a band o' niggers and grabbed us. Ther fust thing we knowed we wuz bound and dragged inter ther bushes. We wuz tied ter ther saddles they'd fixed on ther backs o' tame tigers, an' drove along fer several days till we reached ther interior, when what d'yer think?"

"I think you're a blamed old liar!" roared Charley in disgust.

"Wot!" snorted Tim, with a wrathful look.

"How the deuce would a lot of wild savages know enough to arrange a mechanical skull? Who ever heard of tigers being found on a lonely South Sea island, tamed to drive like horses? And I know that the island you mention is so small that a man could walk across it in half an hour, or less, without talking about it occupying several days mounted on ferocious beasts to do the journey."

The sudden violence of the cowboy appalled Tim.

He took a chew of plug, squirted a stream of saliva out the window, gave a thoughtful hitch at his pants, and calmly said:

"If yer will stow yer remarks till I'm done, I'll gi' ye a account o' how me an' Jim wuz taken to ther willage, put ter pickle in a bar'lo' brine fer two days, salted down, jam-

med in a big brass stew-pot, sot ter boil on a slow fire, an' at ther last minute a box o' cartridges in my pocket busted wi' ther heat, blowed ther biler ter pieces, an' the flyin' fragments killin' ther hull tribe, gave us a show ter walk back ter ther beach, git safely aboard o' ther ole frigate, an'——"

"Hold on!" shouted Charley, holding up his hands in horror.

"Wot's bitin' ye?"

"Do you want to commit suicide?"

"No; why should I?"

"Well, you will, unles you pause for breath."

"Gee whiz! I ain't half through yet."

"Then, for heaven's sake, give it to me in sections once a month."

A terrific uproar down in the dining room met Tim's ears. He heard his monkey howling like a fiend, and the voice of Fritz arose, shouting in savage tones:

"Shiminey Christmas! For vot you done dot—hey? For vhy you vos hooked me mein pipe, und oud by der vinder trow it, you pandy-legged, bug-nosed, vall-eyed, son-ohf-a-ring-tailed babboon?"

A doleful howl from the little red monkey was the only reply.

It pierced Tim's heart.

He realized that the monkey was in distress.

It devolved upon him to go to its rescue.

He did not wait to say another word to Lasso Charley, but he plunged downstairs and rushed into the room.

There he saw Fritz trying to slam the mischievous monkey through the wall by swinging it by the tail.

"Haul to, thar!" yelled the old sailor.

"You mind me your own beesness!" retorted Fritz angrily.

"Hold on, I tell ye!"

"Dot's vot I'm doing."

"Le' go, I mean."

"Not till I bull dis tail oud."

"D'yer want me ter kill yer?"

"Ach, yer don't could done dot alretty."

"Gimme that monkey."

"Dake him!" replied Fritz.

And he flung the little beast at the old sailor.

Thump!

Tim caught it in the face.

He uttered a wild whoop and keeled over.

Bang! went his head on the floor.

It made him see stars.

Away scampered Fritz, uttering a roar of laughter.

The monkey fastened his paws in Tim's whiskers, and began to yank them out by the roots, and the old sailor howled, raved and swore.

He made a wild effort to drive the little beast away, but the more he fought his pet the harder his whiskers were pulled.

In a few moments Tim was full of agony and rage.

"Blast it!" he howled furiously, "wot did I stop ther Dutchman fer? Hey, Fritz! Come back here an' kill this lubber, an' I'll gi' ye ten dollars! Oh, Lor'! Leggo, gosh hang yer ugly mug! Leggo, I say!"

Whiskers was mad.

He thought Tim was to be blamed for the whack he got. And he meant to avenge it, if he got his tail twisted out of joint doing it.

He clawed the old sailor like a demon, he jumped on him, he made faces at him, and he then deliberately set himself to work in an effort to munch off Tim's ear.

In this intention he might have succeeded, had the old fellow not given him a swat with the flat of his hand that knocked his monkeyship flying across the room.

Tim hopped upon his feet.

He then made a dive for his pet.

"Shiver me if I don't sheep-plank yer backstays!" he roared.

The monkey was too wise to undergo this operation.

He therefore made a flying leap through one of the open windows, landed on the ground, and scudded away as fast as he could go.

"Thunder an' lightnin'!" gasped Tim.

He flung open one of the doors, and although the Demon was traveling along rapidly, he made a jump for the ground and tumbled headforemost.

Over and over he rolled.

Then he got up, and with his temper in no manner improved, he glared around upon the sage brush and saw Whiskers going it like a nailer.

The monkey ran, hopped and skimmed along back the way they came from, and Tim rushed after him, intent upon recapturing the little beast.

Jack and the rest had not seen what happened.

Consequently the engine flew ahead, leaving Tim and his pet far behind them, one delighted at his liberty, and the other furious because he could not go fast enough to overtake the little rascal.

The monkey was in his glory.

Every time Tim got within arm's reach of him, away he flew, leaving the sailor behind.

In this manner they kept on, until finally the monkey became so tired that Tim managed to seize him.

"Got ye!" howled the old sailor pantingly. "Blast yer ugly mug! I've a great mind ter—oh, oh! Ouch! He's bit my finger."

The monkey had got a grip on him that made Tim prance.

Tim yelled with pain, and the monkey squeaked, and the end of the old sailor's finger might have come off if he hadn't given Whiskers a thump that made him relax his grip.

Scolding and shaking his pet, and clutching him in a tight grip, Tim suddenly thought of the Demon.

Glancing around, he failed to see her.

She had run on to a distance of five miles, when she faded from view behind a mass of rocks, none of her occupants being aware that the old sailor had been left behind.

Tim was startled.

"Good gosh!" he gasped. "I'm desarted!"

A feeling of blank dismay overwhelmed him, for he realized that his friends did not know what became of him, and had gone on, leaving him miles behind them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRAIRIE WOLVES. ●

"Look out, Jack! We are going straight to our destruction!"

This warning cry pealed from the lips of Lasso Charley a short time after Tim had left the coach.

The cowboy pointed ahead of the Demon.

A slight, but wide depression had appeared in the ground, and the electric machine had run into it.

"What do you mean?" gasped Jack, in startled tones.

"Get the Demon out of this hollow—quick!"

"I don't see any danger——"

"We are on the roof of an underground creek, and——"

Boom!

A loud report interrupted him.

The ground under the motor caved in.

Down sank the Demon into the earth.

The cave-in occurred all along the depression ahead.

A mass of water flew up from amid the falling dirt.

Then there came a violent shock, as the engine struck the bottom.

Every one was flung down, the Demon was half buried, and a boiling and hissing mass of water washed all around her.

By the time Jack recovered his senses Charley and the Dutchman came to a realization of what was transpiring around them.

"By heavens! We are in a fix now!" exclaimed the young inventor.

Lasso Charley heard the dirt pouring into the motor, and running back into the kitchen he saw one of the doors wide open.

A mass of dirt and water was running in.

He hastily pushed it as near shut as he could get it, to keep out the rest of the dirt, and secured it there.

"Tim!" he called.

No reply was given.

"Hey, Tim!" he continued.

Still no answer.

Charley began to feel alarmed.

"Something must have happened to him!" he exclaimed.

Hastening into the engine room, he was amazed to see no sign of the old sailor in there.

At first the gravest fears for Tim entered his mind.

But when he recalled the open door it occurred to him that the old sailor might have left the Demon ere she sunk.

"Fritz!" he called.

"Yah!" replied the Dutchman, appearing.

"What has become of the old sailor?"

"Don't he vos here?" asked Fritz, in surprise.

"No, nor is the monkey on the coach."

"Mein Gott! You dink dey vas under der motors?"

"I believe they must have left her before she fell in here."

"Der last I hear, Dim vas crowlin' mit dot Vhitskers."

"Yes, I heard it, too."

"Vell, I hope me dot noddings vas habben by him."

"As we can't solve the puzzle by remaining here talking about it, let us see what we can do to get the motor out of this hole."

They returned to Jack, and told him of Tim being missing.

He was greatly surprised, and looked as if he felt very uneasy.

"Speculating over his fate will not help us," he remarked. "Tell me what you think of our unlucky situation."

"I tink it vos tough," said Fritz.

Charley glanced up to the surface of the ground.

It was about ten feet above their heads, and the greatest depth was in the middle of the cave-in, while the sides gradually sloped upward until they touched the edges.

In places it would have been possible to have run the motor up to the level ground if she were free and uninjured.

The question to be solved was could they liberate her, and if so, was she in any sort of condition to work?

It seemed that such a fall as she got should have broken her to pieces underneath, and it worried them to know whether she was rendered useless or not.

"My opinion of the situation is mighty poor," said Charley.

"Is this one of the buried creeks?" asked Jack.

"No doubt of it. They rise at their headwaters like any ordinary stream, as you know, some of them as briny as the ocean, and after flowing a short distance upon the surface they fall into sink holes, where they disappear."

"Then this is the subterranean continuation of such a stream?"

"It must be," said Lasso Charley decisively.

"Nothing but hard work will get her out of here now."

"To what work do you refer?"

"Armed with shovels, we must dig her out."

The others saw that this was the only means of clearing her, for she was buried almost to her window frames.

Procuring the necessary tools from the storeroom, they lost no time in getting out the pilot-house window.

Then they began to work.

Fortunately the soil was soft and yielding.

It therefore was an easy matter for them to make an excavation around her truck, whereupon they were glad to observe that the damage sustained by the Demon could easily be repaired.

Darkness fell ere they had her running gear bared, and although it was several hours since Tim was first missed, they saw no signs of him yet.

The electric lights were turned on, and the work continued.

With the fall of night there came the snapping bark, followed by the prolonged shrill howl, of the prairie wolves.

The beasts must have scented the Demon, for they came in large troops about the upper ground, and rushed fleetly down into the long basin formed by the cave-in.

They were doggish-looking brutes, the upper part a dull yellowish color, clouded with black, and the under parts a dirty white.

Gaunt, cowardly, and yet of a desperate nature when in dire need of food, their eyes flamed like coals of fire in the gloom as they rushed about as near as they dared venture to our friends.

The coach had been laid bare by the shovels wielded by our friends, and they drove the coyotes away by discharging a number of shots at them from their rifles.

Then they began to level a path to get the wheels started.

It was midnight when this task was completed.

Jack had been repairing the machinery, while Fritz and the cowboy worked the shovels, and by the time he had fixed the engine so she would work and got the dirt out of her the coyotes returned.

The three then boarded the motor.

"Now to try her," said Jack.

They were all in a state of deep suspense.

He pulled the lever and the machinery moved.

It was hard work for the engine to pull through that soft dirt, but her broad-cogged wheels forced themselves along, and after a vast amount of labor they reached the upper solid ground.

A cheer of delight burst from their lips.

The engine worked as well as ever now.

Glancing along the course of the cave-in, they saw by the light of the moon a narrow, silvery stream far ahead.

It was spreading at one end over the plain.

"There's the creek now that flowed through here," said Jack.

"Der vunder vos dot ve ditn'd vos killed," said Fritz.

"Just see what a vast number of coyotes there are around us," said Charley.

The prairie was fairly alive with their bodies.

Hundreds of them surrounded the motor upon all sides.

Running swiftly to and fro, they barked and howled, and kept circling around and around the Demon, their horrible cries being echoed and re-echoed in the far distance by others of them.

"We must look for Tim!" exclaimed Jack.

"Vot could ohf become ohf him?"

"He wasn't under the motor."

"I am confident that he left the Demon up here somewhere," said Jack.

"Den ve pedder gone back ofer der drail," suggested, Fritz wisely.

Jack nodded, and starting the electric vehicle off, he found that she worked as well as she ever did.

Jack and his companions were very anxious about the old sailor.

His mysterious disappearance greatly puzzled them. They had talked it over continually while working at extricating the Demon, but had been unable to understand it.

As the engine rushed away, Fritz went back to the gun turret, and as Tim had prepared a number of shells, he began to load and fire them among the coyotes that raced after them.

Along they flew, the tower revolving with the gun every few minutes, every shot arousing a terrific report, and blowing up the mangled remains of scores of the wolves.

It was an easy matter for the young inventor to follow the trail of the engine back, for he sent the searchlight blazing ahead, and as the wolves scattered in affright from the light and the discharge of the gun, her tracks in the sage brush were plainly seen.

The moon was fast declining.

In a short time the coyotes disappeared.

They fled in all directions, leaving their dead upon the plain, but another pack soon appeared ahead.

Jack's attention was directed toward them by their howls, and he saw with surprise that they were trooping ahead of the engine much as if they had some particular, objective point.

It aroused the young inventor's curiosity to know where they were going in such vast numbers, and elevating the light, he flashed its rays ahead.

In the distance there was a compact mass of hundreds of them, their collective voices giving rise to a roaring din that grew louder and louder the nearer they approached it.

A few minutes afterwards Jack was intensely startled by hearing a wild cry in the well-known accents of Tim in the distance.

"Help! Help! Demon ahoy!" screamed the old sailor.

That awful cry paled Jack's face to the semblance of a corpse.

"Merciful Heaven!" he muttered hoarsely. "It is Tim! His voice comes from the midst of that pack of wolves!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SIX MEXICAN SHEEP SHEARERS

A terrible fear that poor old Tim was at the mercy of the savage brutes swarming the plains ahead filled Jack's mind.

He peered out, and saw them all swarming to a common center.

As the searchlight flashed upon them, they became startled, and began to scatter in all directions, setting up a wild howl.

"Fritz—Fritz! Fire a shot at those brutes!"

"Donnervetter! I hear Dim among dem."

"Good Lord! He's a dead man! They'll tear him to pieces!" groaned Charley.

It was not a minute later when the young Dutchman fired. The screaming shell fell in the midst of the brutes, and the roar of its explosion set the whole pack in motion.

They sent up a terrible howl.

Rushing in all directions, they evinced the most cowardly fear.

Boom! roared a second shot.

It added to the demoralization of the pack so that they went faster.

As they parted right and left, Jack caught sight of Tim lying on the ground, caught under the trunk of a fallen tree.

It was a lone tree of massive proportions.

They had passed it on their way southward, and had seen that it had at some remote period been struck by lightning.

It was dead.

There were no leaves on it.

At the base it had rotted away.

The trunk lay across the old sailor's body.

He was so pinioned that he could not move.

A glad cry escaped him when he saw the engine come rushing toward him, and he shouted to his friends:

"This way, lads! This way!"

"All right, Tim. We'll soon be with you," cheerily cried Jack.

He saw that Tim had been in a most desperate plight.

Held down by the weight of the tree trunk, he had been unable to protect himself against the attacks of the coyotes.

Up to him dashed the motor like a streak of wildfire, and before she had fairly come to a pause Fritz and Charley alighted.

They carefully lifted the tree trunk from the body of the old sailor, and he rubbed his chest and breathed a deep sigh of intense relief.

"Lordy, now, but I reckon as I'm a-livin' ag'in!" he exclaimed, as his friends shook hands with him.

"Py shiminettys, how you vos got caughded dot vay?" asked Fritz.

"Why, yer see," said Tim, "it happened this way, my lads. This 'ere blamed monkey jumped out ther winder, an' I jumped after him——"

"Troo der vinder?" grinned Fritz.

"No, yer lubber; I went out ther door."

"That accounts for it being open," said Charley.

"Waal, by ther time I got my flippers on this leetle lubber's headgear ther engine wuz out o' sight," proceeded Tim, warming up to his yarn, "an' thar I wuz, desarted on the plains, an' 'night fallin'. I thought if I steered arter ther Demon I'd tramp all ther way ter ther Pacific Ocean, an' then I wouldn't overhaul yer. Wot ter do I didn't know. So then I ups an' waits ter see if ye would miss me an' come back——"

"Vhy ditn'd you coom after us, you bick fool?" growled Fritz. "Yer vould a-fount us only six miles funder aheat unter the grount."

"Under ther ground?" asked Tim, in amazement.

"Fer sure," replied Fritz, as he explained what occurred to the Demon.

"Bless me, but that wuz an experience," said Tim, when the young Dutchman finished. "As I wuz a-sayin', I waited fer ye ter change yer course, but several hours went by, an' I fell asleep. I wuz awakened by a-hearin' ther yowlin' o' them 'ere coyotes, an' jumpin' up I seen as ther plains wuz swarmin' wi' them, an' poor little Whiskers wuz nigh scart outer his wits by 'em. Seein' this 'ere ole tree, I runned fer it an' clumb up, 'cause I didn't hev no weapings ter guard myself. Thar we wuz, Whiskers 'n me, straddlin' a branch an' millions upon millions o' them lubberly coyotes a-flyin' around the bottom o' ther tree, yellin' an' jumpin' fer me. Wall, sir, ter teach 'em better discipline, I hauls out a gun an' fires at 'em. Down they dropped by ther thousands. Ther hull plain wuz covered with thar carcasses. Then ther tree broke. Down we went, an' it on top o' me. On came ther coyotes again, but yer appeared jist in time ter save 'em."

"To save the wolves?"

"Aye, now. I was just a-goin' ter kill a few thousand more when you hove up."

"Oh, Lord!" groined Charley. "First you say you climbed

the tree because you had no weapons, then you say you shot thousands, and now I can't see one dead beast but those we slaughtered with the pneumatic gun."

"Why?" said Tim, in nowise abashed, "ther ones wot I killed wuz eat up by thar messmates as fast as I killed 'em off. That's why yer don't see none o' them left."

"And where's your pistol, or gun, or whatever else you shot with?"

"Ye kin dang me, sir, if one o' them coyotes didn't come so nigh ter me that I ranimed ther gun down his throat and left it thar. He ran off ter ther eastward, an' happenin' ter close his jaws, one o' his teeth hit ther trigger, ther gun went off, an' it blowed his insides out o' a hole punched through ther small o' his back!"

By this time Fritz and Charley were almost sick at their stomachs in their desperate effort to swallow Tim's yarn, so the cowboy said:

"Come! Let's get aboard of the coach and tell Jack your story."

Nothing loth, Tim followed them, clutching Whiskers by the neck.

Jack heard the story without the trimmings.

"You have had a mighty narrow escape from death, Tim," said he. "Those coyotes would undoubtedly have devoured you had we not just arrived. However, as you have baffled them, old fellow, we will drop the subject for the present, as I'm worn out."

They let the motor stand, locked the doors and windows, and all turned in.

It was almost midday when they got up, feeling none the worse for their hard trials, and Fritz prepared their luncheon.

The engine was started off again, with Lasso Charley at the wheel, as he had learned how to manage her.

Running along until nightfall, she came in view of a distant, twinkling light on the plain.

Jack had relieved the cowboy of the wheel, and upon observing the light, he steered the engine toward it just as Tim entered.

"Hello!" said the old fellow. "Wot the deuce is that athwart our course?"

"A ranch, I am pretty sure," replied Jack.

"Wharabouts is we, lad? Ha' ye got yer reckonin'?"

"Yes; we are about fifteen miles south of Stone Cabin, on the Beaver Canyon trail."

"Then we must be well onto Ralston Desert."

"We are; and I'm heading for Black Mountain."

Tim kept his good eye upon the light, and as the engine drew nearer to it he presently discerned a small house and some sheds.

It stood alone in the midst of the lonely wilderness, and when they drew close to it they saw half a dozen dark-faced Mexican sheep shearers clustered about the door curiously staring at the Demon.

They seemed to be afraid of it until they saw human beings aboard, and were crossing themselves, muttering invocations to the saints to protect them, and excitedly jabbering in Spanish interspersed with a low Aztec dialect, only known among their class.

Attired in tall felt hats and semi-barbaric suits of dirty and greasy buckskin, with fringe and wampum ornaments, they had moccasins on their feet, and carried knives and shears in their belts.

"Hola!" yelled one of them, as the engine paused near by.

"Don't alarm yourselves," said Jack in English, although he could speak Spanish fluently. "We mean you no harm."

"What zat locomotive eez zat she not do have tracks?" asked one of them.

"This is an engine built to run over the prairies," explained Jack.

"Ah! Por Dios! I comprend, senor."

"Where is the superintendent of this place?"

"Fuera! He deed gone away to-day."

"Is he coming back to-night?"

"Si, senor. Pronto. Soon, soon!"

"What have you here—cattle?"

"No. Sheep. Bueno—plenty of zem. You entrar here?"

"We will remain a while," replied Jack.

He alighted, and, followed by Fritz and Charley, they entered the house.

There was a table in the front room, on which stood a lantern.

The sheep shearers had been sitting around it playing a game of cards called monte with a Spanish pack, looking much different to the cards used in the north.

For men of their stamp to play cards meant a gambling game, in which they invariably staked all their cash, and that gone the metal checks they are paid with until the shearing is done, when they are cashed by the owners.

The Mexicans resumed their interrupted game.

Jack watched them a while, for they were quick-tempered, excitable fellows, and were perfect demons by nature when fevered by gambling.

Some of them went out to the pens and folds after a while.

Four of them remained at the table playing, and Jack intently listened to their conversation, and saw them furtively watching him.

"It's a rare chance, Pepe," he understood one of them to

"How about the superintendent coming back and catching say.

"True," replied another. "We are alone here, and will not be seen, Juan."

"Bah! Perro! You have a cowardly heart, Pancho."

"Bueno! I'm with the rest. Stop your scolding, or, by the demonio, I'll—"

"Babo! Keep your temper. To quarrel now will spoil all."

"Can these people understand us?"

"No, idiot! Don't you see they only speak English?"

"But would it pay to attack them?"

"Look at the diamond rings and pins two of them wear."

"I see the sparklers. Por mi madre, they are worth a fortune."

Jack was startled.

He realized that they were conspiring to attack him and his friends.

"Where are Jose and Ignacio?" asked Pancho.

"Gone out to shoot the man they left in the engine," replied Juan, who had rolled a cigarette, and was violently puffing at it, and blowing clouds of fragrant smoke through his nostrils.

Jack and his friends, never suspecting danger, were unarmed.

To tell his companions what was said would be to betray the fact that he understood all they had just said.

Nor dared he run for the Demon, for the other two men were then undoubtedly lurking outside the door with drawn pistols, ready to shoot them down if they attempted to escape.

A feeling of desperation took possession of Jack.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BORDER RUFFIANS.

"Gentlemen, can we take a hand in that game? We have plenty of money."

As Jack asked this question, not only the Mexicans looked surprised, but Fritz and Charley evinced the utmost astonishment.

The shearers exchanged significant glances.

They then began to talk among themselves.

"Let them in," said one. "They do not play as we do."

"Yes," assented another, "and we can therefore pluck them easily."

Jack understood this dialogue.

But he had a deep purpose in view.

"Well—your answer?" he exclaimed impatiently.

"Wiz pleasair, senor," replied the man called Juan.

"But they'll gouge us out of our eye-teeth," remonstrated Lasso Charley, hesitatingly. "I've seen these greasers play their skin games before."

"Watch me," replied Jack, winking at him and Fritz. "Do as I do."

The cowboy and the Dutchman at once realized by the significant manner in which Jack spoke that there was something going wrong, although they did not know what it was.

"Go ahet; ve unterferstan'," said Fritz.

Extra stools were drawn up to the table.

Each one of our friends sat between two of the Mexicans.

One of the dark fellows picked up the cards to shuffle them, when Jack attracted his friends' attention.

Noticing that Charley and Fritz were watching him, he repeated:

"Do as I do."

Then he suddenly made a grab for the weapons in the belt of the man nearest to him, and his friends did the same.

A volley of expletives ripped from the Mexicans' lips, they started back, upsetting their chairs, and in a moment the room was in confusion.

Jack and his friends had each secured a knife.

"What's up?" panted Charley breathlessly.

"They mean to rob and murder us," replied Jack.

Then the Dutchman and the cowboy understood the situation, and the Mexicans realized that their plan was exposed.

The shearers darted away from our friends with one accord, and getting across the room, began to haul pistols from their bosoms, where they lay concealed.

Seeing these weapons alarmed our friends, for the knives they had secured were no match for such weapons.

"Confound it! They'll kill us yet. Run for the motor!" cried Jack.

They dashed out of the door, escaping just as the Mexicans fired, and the reports attracted the two men lurking outside.

As Jack glanced up, he saw one of them at his side.

The rascal was only a yard distant, raising his pistol to fire.

Quick as a flash Jack drove the knife at him, and the keen point pierced the shearer's arm, causing him to yell and drop his pistol.

Tim appeared at the coach door, armed.

He had heard the noise of the fracas.

Seeing the other man running toward his friends, Tim fired.

The ball struck the Mexican, and dropped him in his tracks, and as the four men appeared in the doorway, clutching their pistols in their hands, Tim gave them a shot.

One of the Mexicans was hit.

The searchlight playing upon them, plainly revealed their forms.

This unexpected diversion gave Jack and his companions a chance to reach the Demon, and they lost no time getting aboard.

Once safe inside they breathed easier.

"Now we are all right," muttered Jack.

"Vot vas der medder mit dem?" queried the Dutchman.

"Why, they planned to kill us for the sake of the few jewels they saw upon us," replied Jack.

"Gee whiz, wot pirates!" growled the old sailor.

"Punish them," said Jack vehemently.

They all armed themselves with pneumatic firearms.

The Mexicans had retreated within the house and extinguished the light, in order to conceal their movements.

But it was useless, for our friends poured a volley at the house, and as the searchlight played upon the building, its rays shot in at the door and windows, lighting the interior as if by sunlight.

Before the Mexicans could close the doors and windows two more of them were wounded.

They then rushed out the back door, and got behind the house for protection, taking their wounded friends with them.

It was a useless move, for Jack observed them, and mounting to the turret he sent the demon around the house after them.

"Fire again!" he shouted to his friends.

Bang! Bang! Bang! exploded three more shots.

Every time a ball burst, it was followed by a cry of pain.

By that time every one of the six had fallen.

Jack was just about to alight when he heard the pounding of several horses' hoofs rapidly approaching.

"Here comes some one!" he exclaimed.

"More ohf dem?" eagerly cried the pugnacious Fritz.

"Perhaps," assented Jack. "Don't fire, though, till we are sure."

"No; but, blast me, if we won't be ready for 'em," said Tim.

"I see three men on horseback," said Lasso Charley.

The horsemen were coming up at a furious pace from the south, and as Jack shot the searchlight upon them, he observed that they were not Mexicans.

All three wore sombreros, red shirts and pants tucked in their boots, while their faces were plainly those of Americans.

"Hello, there!" yelled the bearded leader, as he came closer to the Demon, "what in thunder is all this firing about?"

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Jack, from the turret.

"The overseer of this sheep ranch."

"Ah! And your companions?"

"Two of my shepherds."

"Good! You are the very man I want."

"For what?"

"Your six Mexican shearers tried to rob and murder us."

"They did?"

"For their pains, they were all wounded," continued Jack, and he thereupon explained who he was and what had happened.

The overseer was surprised.

He examined the treacherous Mexicans.

Then he turned to Jack, and said:

"Scrv'd them right. They are a bad lot. They make it a business of going from ranch to ranch, making contracts for work in shearing time, and earning a pew pesos, gamble them away."

Jack invited the overseer aboard.

He showed the man the Demon, and after some further conversation took leave of him and started the vehicle away.

The young inventor wanted some information about the desert, and having learned all he desired to know, was satisfied.

All night long the engine ran over a tract as sandy as the Sahara, and named Black Mountain.

Her course then trended toward the Lava Fields.

It was a desolate tract, which had once been swept by the output of an active volcano, and made rough going.

At the break of day they passed this rough, stony country, and continued on toward Oasis Valley.

Late in the afternoon they reached the intersection of the Belmont and Gold Hill trails, at the junction of which there was a spring.

Jack was heading for this point, under the direction of the cowboy, to replenish their water tanks, the supply of which was running low.

Upon reaching the trail he stopped the engine.

"I don't see any sign of a spring here," he remarked.

"No; its waters don't run ten yards ere it sinks in the sand again," replied Lasso Charley. "Do you see those rocks yonder?"

"Yes," assented Jack, looking to the southeast.

"Among them stands a little log cabin. It is built over the spring. The place is generally made an encampment by the cowboys of the Park Canyon Peak Ranch. It is one of the biggest cattle ranges on this side of the border. I don't think much of the owner's men."

"Why?"

"Because they are a hard crowd—the scum of the cities—refugees from the law. There are over fifty on that big ranch, and they are forever quarreling, running amuck and creating as much damage as the worst outlaws among the stage routes of the Black Hills."

Jack was not very favorably impressed.

"Let us go over to the spring and see if it's dried up. Should it be running, we'll fill our tanks and travel all night to escape the awful heat of the sun that pours down upon the desert."

They alighted and strode toward the rocks.

A few minutes' walk brought them among them.

Following a winding path, they came to a clearing, in the middle of which stood an old log cabin.

Shining through the chinks they saw a light.

"The place is occupied," said Charley, pausing irresolutely.

"By whom—the cowboys you mentioned?" questioned Jack.

"Very likely. To be certain, let us reconnoiter."

They quietly stole up behind the solitary hut, and heard voices coming from within the little building.

It was manifest that there were a number of men in the place, as their loud, coarse voices, rude laughter, oaths, songs, and jests indicated, and Jack peered through a crevice.

In a fireplace at once side burned a fire, over which a spit-roasted piece of beef was roasting.

The bubbling spring was in a corner.

The floor was strewn with rugs, blankets, saddles, and other equipments, and the room was filled with a smoking, drinking gang of dark-featured men with a most forbidding look.

"Regular border ruffians, bullies and toughs!" muttered Jack.

As he studied them, his attention was directed upon one of them in particular, sitting near the fire.

The light of the flames flickered over his features ruddily, and to Jack's astonishment he saw that the man was Martin Dale.

"By heavens! There's Bob Crow's murderer!" he muttered. Just then a footstep sounded behind them, and a gruff voice sang out:

"Hey, you! Hands up thar, on by the eternal C.O. don't ye!"

CHAPTER XV.

CHASING A HERD OF ANTELOPE.

Startled by hearing that unexpected voice behind them, Jack and Lasso Charley wheeled around, and were confronted by a brace of revolvers.

They were held by a man in cowboy's costume, his dark face covered by a black, bushy beard.

"Hold on, partner," said the young inventor quickly. "Don't fire."

"What be ye doin' thar, anyway?" growled the man suspiciously.

"We are strangers here—saw your light—peeped in to see who made it."

"Come here."

They both obeyed.

He scrutinized them closely.

Bursting out laughing, he pocketed his pistols.

"You're a Tenderfoot, sure," he remarked to Jack.

Their voices alarmed the men in the hut, and they swarmed out.

"Run for the machine, Charley."

"Go ahead, Jack."

They dashed away among the rocks.

"Hey, come back yere!" howled the man who held them up. "I want ter interjuce ye ter ther boys. Come yere, I tell ye!"

But the two paid no heed to him.

"Why are you running?" panted Charley.

"Martin Dale is in the hut with them."

"What? Good Lord! Is that so?"

"I don't want him to see us."

"Why not?"

"He'd have the whole gang after us."

"Then you think——"

"That he is going to take them to the mine."

"Merciful powers! Ha! What's this?"

"Their mustang corral."

"There's over fifty horses here, too."

"Let's stampede them to prevent pursuit."

"Bully for you! That's just the plan."

They had come upon a roped-in tract where browsed a large herd of mustangs belonging to the cowboys.

Jack severed the rop, and they rushed into the corral and attacked the horses with saplings, driving them out.

The beasts took fright, and dashed wildly away.

Hearing what they were doing, the cowboys came rushing toward the corral, and hearing their voices Jack and Charley fled.

Just after they reached the Demon, the vaqueros burst from behind the rocks and rushed toward them.

Several caught their ponies.

Mounted on their bare backs, they drove after the stampeded animals to capture and bring them back.

Martin Dale was the first one to appear.

As soon as he saw the Demon, he paused, and yelled:

"It's Jack Wright and his Demon of the Plains."

A veritable howl arose among his companions, and they began to fire at the engine with their revolvers.

A hail of bullets rattled against the strong metal, without being able to penetrate the interior.

"Arm yourselves and repel them!" cried Jack.

The hostility of the cowboys upon hearing his name mentioned sufficed to let him realize that they looked upon him as an enemy.

"They are in league with Dale," he muttered.

Nor was he mistaken.

The villain had come down to Wens Lake on the Colorado Railroad, where he fell in with some of the gang, and then had gone on to the spring to meet the rest and enlist them in his scheme to jump Lasso Charley's claim, to which they all agreed.

His friends having armed themselves they fired back at the cowboys and drove them behind the shelter of the rocks.

From there they maintained a dropping fire upon the motor, and as Jack saw no chance to get the best of them, he said:

"It's of no use fighting them this way."

"How about dot vater ve wanted?" asked Fritz.

"Can't get any now. They have more than likely formed a plot to steal your mine, Charley, and we must baffle them."

"By all means," assented the cowboy.

"The only way to do so is to reach the place ahead of them."

"Go ahead, then. By daylight we'll be there."

Jack started the machinery, and turning the Demon around, he sent her flying along the smooth trail.

A yell of exultation escaped the cowboys.

They thought they had driven our friends away.

In a few minutes they were left out of sight behind the Demon.

"Another escape!" grimly said Jack.

"They are dangerous men," Lasso Charley replied.

"If I did not know that there were some good cowboys in the world, I would judge by my past experience among them that they are a pretty bad lot of men all through."

"Aye, aye!" replied Tim, as he took a chew of plug. "But then a lad can't never judge by appearances. I foun' that out when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash in ther navy."

"How do you mean?" queried Charley curiously.

"Waal, yer 'see, we wuz a-sailin' along the coast o' Labrador one night, an' I wuz at ther wheel, when an Indian canoe came up astarn o' us, a brave clumb over the taffrail, I wuz hit on ther head wi' a tomahawk, an' when I came ter my senses, I foun' myself on shore whar he took me."

"Quite a daring exploit," commented Charley.

"Werry true fer you, sir. Waal, thar I wuz, tied to a stake, an' about forty-six o' them 'ere savages wuz claspin' han's an' dancin' in circles about ther stake singin' Ring-around-rosy all aroun' me."

"Going to burn you at the stake, eh?"

"So I thought," assented Tim. "'cause they piled a heap o' brushwood aroun' me an' sot fire to it. Ther smoke an' flames riz up about my ole hulk an' I began to fry. I reckoned ther jig wuz up wi' me, when all o' a sudden, wot d'yer think?"

"Name it. I ain't good at answering conundrums."

"Afore ther fire could do me any damage, they kicked it all away, liberated me, gave me a glass o' grog, an' a calumet pipe, dropped down on their marrer bones, an' began ter worship me like sons of guns."

"Oh, come, Tim——"

"It's a fack. Yer see, they'd only lit ther fire ter disinfect my clothes, 'cause Injuns hates ther smell o' tar stickin' ter all sailors. An' ther reason they worshipped me wuz this: Ther time ther Mayflower came over wi' ther Pilgrims, my great-grandfather's grandfather wuz aboard o' her. When they landed, he'd saved ther life o' ther chief o' this tribe, an' they wuz grateful to my fambly. From generation ter generation they swore they'd pectect us——"

"Well, well, w——"

"Seein' me aboard o' ther passin' ship, they sent out one o' their warriors ter bring me ashore so's ter show their gratitude. Waal, sir, we all got b'ilin' drunk, an' they ast me ter be ther chief. I consented, but tellin' 'em I didn't have a bath in six months, I begged 'em ter le' me go down ter ther

shore an' have a dip. They agreed; but ther minit I got in ther sea, I swam fer ther frigate, got aboard, an I ain't seed nuthin' o' them since. Now, don't that prove ter ye as no man kin jedge by appearances?"

"It does," assented Charley grimly. "That's the case with you."

"Me?" asked Tim, in perplexity.

"Yes. To look at you any one would think you'd fall in a spasm if a man told a falsehood to you. But, upon my word, you are the biggest liar left unhung. Do you think I believe that fairy story?"

"If yer don't, yer must be a idjit," indignantly said Tim. He believed the story himself.

It therefore was strange to him that Charley doubted it.

"I don't want to go to the trouble of pointing out all the errors there were in that yarn," said the cowboy. "I'll leave it to your own conscience to find them, Tim. But I do know that if you attempt to spring another one on me for Gospel, I'll break your precious neck!"

"Wot! Threaten me? Why, blast yer timbers, I——"

But just then Jack interrupted them with:

"There goes a herd of antelope! Take the wheel, Tim."

"Goin' ter hev a shot at 'em, my lad?" queried the old fellow, complying.

"Yes. Jingo, how they are going. We will have a hard job to get within gun range, fast as the Demon is."

Jack picked up a rifle and went out on the roof.

The antelope numbered four.

They had seen the blazing searchlight, took fright, and ran away.

Off they dashed to the southward at a pace that was tremendous, and caused Tim to put on all the electric force in the storage batteries.

An exciting chase began.

The faster the engine tore along over the prairie grass, the swifter the antelope ran in fright from the appalling machine.

Having a lead of half a mile, they kept it.

But this could not last.

No creature can maintain a run as long as an engine.

As they finally became tired, they began to lose ground.

This was just exactly what Jack expected to see happen.

Slowly but surely the Demon drew closer and closer to them until at last she arrived in range of the flying beasts.

Crack! went a shot from Jack's weapon.

It had hit one of the fugitive animals.

Down went the antelope upon its knees.

It rolled over and over upon the grass, and expired.

Along thundered the Demon like a thing of life after the rest.

The three antelopes had become terrified by the shot, and their fear lent additional speed to their long, slender legs.

Bang! went a second shot.

It tore a hole in the leading animal's body.

The creature was blown a dozen feet away, and expired.

Just then the other two swerved off to the right, and the light went out.

One of the carbons had slipped in its socket, and Tim did not stop the machine, although the sudden transition from the light to the dense gloom almost blinded him temporarily.

He had seen where the antelopes had gone, and kept the machine flying along after them.

"Look out! Stop her!" yelled Jack from the roof.

His warning came too late.

There sounded a violent crash under the Demon, and as he came to a sudden pause, Jack was hurled from the roof.

CHAPTER XVI.

JUMPING THE CLAIM.

In a few moments a scene of the most intense confusion occurred.

Every one was asking what had happened.

Tim stopped the machinery as quick as possible.

Hearing Jack groaning outside, Fritz seized a lantern and left the Demon.

Finding the young inventor lying upon the ground beside the electric carriage, the young Dutchman bent over him and saw that he was stunned.

"Pring me some vater!" he yelled.

"What's the matter out there?" demanded Charley.

"Shack vas near killed alretty!"

"Lord save us!" groaned Tim in alarm.

He stumped out with a pitcher of water, and they all got at the young inventor and made every effort to revive him.

Jack had received a severe bump on the head when he fell.

But they finally managed to bring him to, and he arose, rubbing his scalp ruefully, and asked:

"What has happened to the coach?"

"Struck a rock," replied Charley, who saw what had happened.

"Anything broken?"

"Yes, one of the small front wheels."

"That's bad; it may delay us."

"Can you mend it?"

"I don't know till I see it. I'll——"

"But what?" asked Charley.

"While we are delayed the cowboys may reach the mine ahead of us."

They all pulled long faces as this possibility occurred to them.

Jack saw a large rock, against which the Demon had run, and then critically examined the broken steering wheel.

The broad, flat rim was cracked in several places.

"Serious damage," he commented.

"Can't ye do nuthin' with it?" asked Tim gloomily.

"Probably. I'll try. Bring me the jack and a wrench."

Fritz fetched the required tools.

The wheel was then taken off and carried inside.

Jack spent most of the night in an effort to repair it.

Leaving Tim and Fritz working at it, he finally turned in.

On the following morning it was not half finished, and he resumed his labor and stuck to it all day.

By the fall of the following night he completed his task.

The wheel was reset, and when the Demon started again, it worked satisfactorily enough for their purpose.

"Had we been anywhere near civilization," said Jack, as the Demon sped along, "I would have had a new wheel cast. As it was impossible to do so here, I had to lose time to repair it."

"If Martin Dale an' ther blamed land pirates as he has around him means ter jump Lasso Charley's claim," said Tim, "by this time they must be at ther place a workin' it."

"Ve von't leaf 'em dere long," grimly asserted Fritz. "I've vos pedder as a fights mit dem ratskal alretty."

"I calculate that we ought to reach the claim before daylight," said the cowboy. "It lies in a bad place to approach. A handful of men could hold it against an army."

"You don't mean an army with a gun such as ours?" laughed Jack.

They had supper after that, and the searchlight was repaired.

Then the watch was divided.

All night the engine ran along smoothly.

Each steersman kept the searchlight swaying ahead on the lookout for other dangerous obstructions.

At six o'clock in the morning the Demon passed through the Ash Meadows, and down the eastern side of Armagosa Creek, and crossed the border.

The stream buried itself in the ground, but reappeared further on, and finally poured into Death Valley, where it disappeared.

Lying across the border were two rugged ranges of hills to the south of the valley, between which there rose a boiling spring.

This geyser was a small mound rising from the middle of a hot lake, at times being totally inactive.

After an interval of silence there would sound a rumbling roar that shook the earth around the mound.

Then a vast jet of hot water would shoot high up in the air from it.

For a while the boiling spring would play with impressive grandeur, and then it would subside as suddenly as it made its appearance.

It stood at the entrance of a wild gorge, through which a branch of the Armagosa Creek flowed.

Every one was up when they reached the canyon.

Pointing at the gloomy opening, Lasso Charley said:

"There is where my claim lies, Wright."

"It's a forbidding looking place. Is the claim far up?"

"Quarter of a mile. You had better be on your guard now."

"If the cowboys have jumped the claim, I'll drive them out."

Jack then directed his companions to prepare for war.

While Fritz and Charley armed themselves with rifles and manned the loopholes in the windows, Tim went up in the revolving turret and loaded the big pneumatic gun.

The young inventor screened the wheel-house windows.

He then drove the Demon up into the canyon slowly, and found the utmost difficulty in steering her among the rocks and shrubs.

On either side there towered up enormous cliffs several hundred feet high, covered with moss and bushes.

But little sunlight penetrated the wild defile.

Through the center rippled the silver stream of pure water, and the bottom on either side was covered with bushes, vines and trees.

Few birds haunted the gloomy place.

There were many wild beasts and reptiles lurking amid the foliage and underbrush, however.

By keeping close to the bed of the stream Jack avoided the many obstructions in the Demon's way, and proceeded further in.

The carriage had just arrived abreast of a point where the bushes grew thickest, when suddenly a deafening volley of rifle shots poured out on either side of the defile.

A dozen bullets were sent crashing against the vehicle, but did not penetrate, and our friends beheld a number of men lurking in the bushes on the ledges above the Demon.

It only required a glance to show that they were the same cowboys who had been in the hut with Martin Dale.

"I made no mistake. They are here to hold the mine," muttered Jack.

Then he shouted to his friends:

"Fire at them—quick!"

Tim was the first to comply.

An appalling roar followed the explosion of the projectile.

A tremendous mass of rocks, dirt and shrubbery flew up in the air.

Mingled with the debris were the bodies of several of the

Fritz and Charley used their rifles on the men at the other side of the canyon, and their yells of pain, rage and terror added to the awful din of the exploded shell fired by the gun.

The cowboys shot back at the engine repeatedly.

It was useless, however, for she was built to withstand a worse assault than this, and then the rascals fled.

Jack kept the Demon going.

By pursuing the cowboys he expected them to lead him to the rest, if more there were, and this result was finally attained.

Some distance further on he observed the rocks and ledges fairly swarming with the vaqueros.

Every one of them were armed.

They were upon one side of the canyon.

"The claim is in back of them!" shouted Charley.

"Whereabouts?"

"In that rift they are standing near."

"Drive them back, boys!" Jack roared.

"Aye, aye!" answered the sailor.

He worked the gun continuously after that.

Turning the turret so as to bring the piece to bear upon the defile, he sent shot after shot into the opening.

The havoc and destruction wrought by the weapon was terrific.

Rocks and trees were sent flying in all directions every time one of those appalling shells burst, and they could hear the voices of the cowboys howling furiously as they receded up the rift.

In a short time these sounds ceased.

Jack had brought the motor to a pause opposite the entrance to the defile, for he saw that it was not wide enough to admit her passage.

He then went downstairs.

"Charley, put on a suit of armor," said he. "I'm going up into that opening to see what your claim is."

"We are running a great risk."

"Are you afraid?"

"No, sir."

"Then come on."

They each donned a suit of mail, armed themselves, and leaving the motor, entered the opening.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DREADFUL REVENGE.

A few yards within the opening Jack and the cowboy came to a pause.

There was a large opening excavated in the side of the cliff, in which lay a number of shovels, picks, crowbars and other implements.

It was evident that the cowboys had been mining the place, for a quartz ledge had been barred by the digging.

Jack saw that it was an extraordinary lead.

The rock was streaked with heavy veins of dark yellow gold, and the lead he saw was a very large one.

It was bound to pan out at least \$500 to a ton, and ultimately proved to be one of the richest bearing ledges in that wonderful section of gold-producing country.

Inexperienced as Jack was, he saw that the claim was worth a fabulous amount of money, and therefore did not blame the cowboy for wishing to redeem and work it.

"Is this the place?" he asked.

"Yes, and I see they have been operating it," replied Charley.

"Some of the ore has been taken out, but not a great deal."

"Enough to excite the cupidity of those desperate men."

"True; they will probably fight hard to hold it."

"And they have the advantage of being on foot and having mustangs. It gives them the ability to maneuver around us at will, while we, encumbered by the electric carriage, must remain almost inactive."

"There is only one way for us to save your claim."

"And that?"

Run to the nearest city, and procure miners and implements to work it. Those fellows will hang around here and keep out of our way, waiting like vultures to swoop down upon it the moment we leave the neighborhood."

"But you know I can't afford to do this."

"I can," replied Jack quietly. "Once the mine is well developed you can sell out."

"We can sell out, you mean," interposed Charley.

"Then your purpose is——"

"I intend to share equally among the four of us."

"You are a generous fellow."

"Only under that condition will I consent to your plan. There is enough money in this to enrich every one of us."

"Very well. Now what is the nearest city?"

"We could do best at Independence on the Colorado Railroad. If we——"

"Back with you!" interposed Jack.

He sprang into the hollow, for just then he had caught sight of the cowboys on top of the cliffs aiming their pistols down at them.

Charley attempted to follow him.

Before he could do so a volley of shots were fired.

A number of the bullets struck the cowboy and knocked him down.

He was unhurt, however, for the metal casing about him was utterly impervious to the effect of the bullets.

He had scarcely risen to his feet when an awful grinding crash was heard up aloft, and both peered upward.

An enormous boulder had been lodged in the defile near the top, but having become loosened by some means it now came crashing down toward the bottom.

Huge blocks of jutting stone and masses of dirt, weighing tons, that were in its way, were knocked out, and sent flying down with it.

When the mighty rock struck the bottom of the defile, there came a tremendous shock that shook the ground.

The entire bottom of the defile was choked up by the boulder.

The retreat of Jack and Lasso Charley to the motor was cut off, for it was impossible for them to get up over that rock now.

As soon as Jack realized this, he shouted to Tim:

"Can you reach us?"

"No!" yelled the sailor.

"Then run the Demon to the canyon entrance."

"How air ye goin' ter git out?"

"By reaching the top of the cliffs."

"We'll meet ye thar."

A moment afterward Jack heard the engine running away, and he resolved to give it plenty of time.

"Come on, then, and keep your pistols in readiness."

Jack led the way up the defile.

He saw no signs of their enemies now.

The bed of the defile had evidently once been a water-course.

It was rough, steep, and very stony, but they clambered up, and finally reaching the top, saw a plain stretching away to the west that rolled down to the level country in billowy wells.

They had scarcely made their appearance when they heard the clatter of hoofs, and observed about thirty of the cowboys mounted on mustangs, driving furiously toward them

from a clump of bushes where several more of the beasts were tethered.

Spreading in a circle around the intrepid pair, the ranchmen let their lassos fly, and the sinuous loops flew from all sides.

In a moment both Jack and his companion were pinioned by a number of the lassos, and were pulled to the ground.

One of the lariats encircling each one of them were quickly bound around and around them, pinioning their arms to their sides.

Just then Martin Dale reached them.

"Fate is playing into my hands," he exclaimed exultantly.

"Apparently," was Jack's dry answer.

"I have not forgotten what you did to me in Wrightstown."

"Oh, I didn't mean you should."

"Your life shall pay for that deal."

"Fire away. We ain't afraid of death."

"Kill you outright? Oh, no! You shall suffer first."

"Going to torture us, eh?"

"You shall be made to endure some of the agony you made me suffer. You shall die lingeringly—terribly—in agony."

"What fiendish plan have you consummated now?"

"I will show you. Lift them, boys!"

Four of the cursing cowboys raised them roughly from the ground.

Both Jack and his companion were cast into a fit of doubt over the probable fate Dale had in store for them.

They were carried to the edge of the canyon.

It was at least three hundred feet sheer descent to the bottom, and made any one dizzy to look down into the dark abyss.

Here they were flung upon the grass.

"Pinion their ankles!" said Dale to his companions.

They eagerly carried out this order, for a number of them yet stung from the wounds they had received at the hands of our friends.

"Going to throw us down into the canyon?" asked Jack curiously.

"No. But you will throw yourselves down," answered Dale.

"I do not catch your meaning."

"You will when you undergo the ordeal. Disarm them!"

The cowboys took their weapons away.

"Gag them!" was Dale's next order.

It was promptly carried out.

Neither Jack nor his companion could utter a word.

"With these two out of the way, we will have only the sailor and Dutchman to contend with," said Dale, addressing his companions. "It will be an easy matter to gain the mastery of them. Then we will be avenged for the wounds they have given us, and sole possession of the gold claim will be ours."

"Good enough!" gruffly assented one of the men.

The rest gave their approval by various remarks.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes."

"Then cut their wrist bonds."

Jack and his companion had their arms liberated.

"Slide them over!" ordered Dale.

Several of the cowboys seized their prisoners.

It was useless to fight against them, as their legs were bound fast, so Jack and his companion offered no resistance.

They were carried to the edge of the chasm.

Here they were slid over the gulf.

"Hold on to the edge!" Dale shouted at them.

They were both glad enough to comply, and there they hung by their fingers, their bodies hanging over the abyss.

"You can't haul yourselves up," Dale yelled at them. "We will riddle you with bullets the moment you do. There you will hang by your hands until your strength gives out. Your torture of mind will appease my longing. Then you will let go and fall down—down—down! Ha, ha, ha!"

His mocking laugh grated harshly on our friends' ears, and as the cowboys retreated they were left to their sorrowful thoughts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WRONG MAN.

Unaware of the peril of their friends, Tim and Fritz had hastily driven the Demon out of the canyon, and reached the plains.

It required quite a large detour to do this, and as no one interfered with them, they finally got the engine on level ground.

The rolling hills met Tim's view presently, up on which he saw the cowboys and their ponies at the distance of a league. Fritz was steering the engine.

The old sailor made his way to the turret, and having loaded the gun, he aimed it at the cluster of horsemen and fired.

A shriek came back from the long projectile as it went darting through the air, and they soon saw it strike near the cowboys.

It blew up a mass of rock and dirt.

The ruffians who had captured Jack and Charley were startled.

Having their attention attracted toward the motor, they saw it coming and took fright at the accuracy of the old sailor's aim at such long range with the terrible gun.

Another shot exploding near them caused the rascals to hastily mount their horses and speed away.

Martin Dale had an apprehension that his victims might be saved.

So imbued was he with this notion that it filled his mind with a desire to avoid being baffled in his revenge.

He grasped his rifle and rushed toward the edge of the chasm with the intention of striking the fingers of his victims with the gun to make them release their hold and fall down into the chasm.

Before he could carry out his fiendish intention, the second shot came and exploded so near him that a cloud of dirt struck him.

He was knocked down upon his face.

It made him think the shot was expressly intended for him.

Bounding to his feet, and completely unstrung, he vaulted astride of his mustang and galloped after his flying companions.

A third shot from the gun sent the whole horde racing for their lives, as it exploded almost at the heels of their ponies.

For a while their victims gained a respite.

There was, however, a more dreadful danger staring the two in their faces.

The weight of their suits sadly taxed their strength.

Rapidly becoming exhausted by being forced to hang there, and their agony augmented ten-fold by being obliged to keep silent in consequence of the gags in their mouths, the Demon was hovering near them.

The occupants of the electric vehicle could not see them

as they came flying up the hill on the lookout for the defile.

Nor could the victims of the cowboys cry out for help when they heard the wheels of the coach go flying by where they hung.

"They ain't got Jack nor Charley with 'em!" said Tim, as he watched the horsemen.

"No; dey yet must be down in dot defiles," answered Fritz.

"Them 'ere shots o' mine sent 'em flyin'."

"Fer sure; but yer needn't plow about id."

Tim, having no further need to operate the gun, now made his way toward the wheel-house, when Fritz roared:

"Dere vos some more ohf dem, Dim!"

"Whar?" gasped the old sailor, stumping to one of the windows.

"By dem pushes."

"Aye, now I sees 'em. Stop her!"

Fritz complied, and Tim left the coach.

He had seen that the men were lying on the ground wounded.

Approaching them, he heard one of them yell:

"Give me a drink! I'm dying."

"Wot! Arter ther way yer treated us?"

"Don't go back on a dying man."

"Blow me if I will, enemy though ye be," said Tim.

He handed his whisky flask to the suffering wretch, and his kindness touched the rascal's heart.

"I didn't expect this of you," he exclaimed gratefully. "Let me repay—"

"Get out," interposed Tim in kind tones. "I don't want no pay from yer, lad. I'm only sorry as yer wuz foolish enough ter toy with our guns."

"One good turn deserves another," thoughtfully said the man. "I deserved all I got, perhaps. I can't die with a double murder on my conscience."

"A double murder? Wot d'yer mean, lad?"

"Your two friends are on the point of death."

"Wot—Jack and Charley?"

"They are hanging over the cliff by their hands."

"Gee whiz! Wharabouts?"

"Back of those bushes."

Tim yelled for Fritz and rushed for the spot.

There he saw two pair of hands desperately clutching the rock.

He and Fritz quickly seized them by the hands and pulled them up. Both were very much exhausted.

"How did you discover us?" faintly asked Charley, who felt as if his arms had been pulled out of joint.

"One of ther cowboys told me whar ye wuz."

"He deserves a reward."

"Aye, aye! He will soon have it."

"What do you mean, Tim?"

"He's a-dyin'—is p'r'aps dead now."

"Isn't that Dale's gang flying down the plain yonder?"

"Aye, aye!"

"Let us pursue them."

They left the wounded men where they were.

Returning to the motor and going aboard, Jack and Charley took off their cumbersome suits of mail.

The Demon was then started in pursuit of the cowboys, and made rapid headway down the hills.

Away rattled the coach, and by the time she had reached the plain she had gained half the lead the cowboys had.

To Fritz's disgust, he saw the men spread out like a fan presently, and each individual pursued a different direction.

"Dot saddles it!" groaned the exasperated Dutchman.

"Settles what?" asked Jack in surprise.

"Now ve don't could got 'em."

"Why not?"

"Dey vos sebarated."

"Confound it!"

He picked up a powerful field glass and scanned them. Presently he pointed out one of the flying riders and said:

"That one looks to me like Dale. Chase him, Fritz."

"Ve must led der rest go, den."

"Can't help it. Dale is our particular prey."

"Leiber Gott! How that man ride!"

He steered the Demon after the cowboy in question.

Along they thundered over the plain like wildfire, the Demon swiftly closing up the gap that separated them.

On, on, faster and faster.

Finally Jack picked up a rifle and fired at the fugitive's horse.

It fell dead in its tracks, throwing the rider.

Up to him dashed the electric carriage, and Jack glanced at the man.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" he gasped. "This ain't Martin Dale! We have been chasing the wrong man!"

CHAPTER XIX.

SELLING OUT.

Dismounting from the Demon, the young inventor approached the cowboy, who had risen to his feet and stood with folded arms sullenly watching him.

"Say! What direction did Martin Dale take?" he demanded.

"Drove away to the east," replied the man.

"What were the plans of your gang in regard to our claim?"

"There's no use in lying. You saw how we jumped the claim."

"How came your crowd to join Dale in the enterprise?"

"He showed us the grant papers of the claim, and said it would pan out big."

"Then he really did have the papers Bob Crow stole from Charley," Jack thought, for this was the first definite information he had about it.

After a short pause he said to the cowboy:

"Dale murdered his best friend to rob him of those papers."

"He did?" asked the other, in surprise.

"Yes—dragged him with a lariat. You did wrong to join him."

"We didn't know anything about him."

"I suppose not. Now listen to me."

"Well?" asked the cowboy.

"You and your friends will never own the claim."

"I am satisfied of that."

"But you need not return to your ranche empty handed."

"What else can we do?"

"There is a reward of \$5,000 for Dale's body, dead or alive."

"Who offered it?" eagerly asked the other.

"The authorities. He's a murderer. I told you. If you bring Dale back to Elko, you will get the reward."

"I wish I could."

"I will give you your liberty under a certain condition."

"Will you?" eagerly cried the cowboy, who expected to be arrested.

"Yes. It is that you tell your friends what I have said about Dale."

"Lor! That's easy. None of us cared much for him, anyway. Sooner than get nothing the boys would be glad to earn that reward."

"If you don't tell the rest, Dale may escape you individually. By letting the gang know, no matter who captures him, all of you will share the reward."

"That's so. I never thought of that. I'll take mighty good care to make a contract with them to that effect when we meet."

"Now go."

The man strode away.

He had no pony now and would have a long tramp.

Jack returned aboard of the Demon well satisfied.

Every one laughed at Jack's way of turning the tables.

They watched the cowboy tramping off alone, and then ran the motor toward the town they were heading for.

Reaching it in due time, our friends found everything they wanted there, and secured a number of miners.

Within a few days they had the claim in operation, and it developed into one of the richest leads in that section.

The news of the great find spread like wildfire through the adjacent settlements, and there was a rush for the place.

Claims were staked out, houses sprang up, and in a remarkably short space of time the place was densely populated.

Among other speculators lurking about the great western cities are syndicates of capitalists, ever ready and eager to invest large sums of money in mines and other property giving promise of paying a large percentage.

Several of these investment companies having heard of the mine our friends were working, sent their experts to examine the claim ere it was worked out, to see what it was worth.

The report they returned was very favorable.

And the next things in order were several tempting offers made to our friends to purchase the property.

They held a meeting, and decided to sell out to the highest bidder.

Accordingly this was done.

A handsome profit was the result.

The money was equally divided among the four in the form of crisp new greenbacks of very high denomination.

"That settles our interest in the mine," laughed Jack that night, as he and his friends sat in the dining room of the Demon with the money in four stacks on the table in front of them. "We have no further interest in remaining here now."

"Vot you brobose dot ve do?" asked Fritz.

"Finish our journey by going on to San Francisco, as I originally intended to do, and examine the ranches along the route, as I have some idea of purchasing one."

"Aye, now, that plan just suits me," assented Tim.

"Hark!" muttered Lasso Charley, suddenly.

They heard a scratching noise against the motor.

At first they imagined it was caused by either the monkey or the parrot, but they soon saw the bird and beast asleep in a corner.

The sound was repeated.

It seemed to come from outside the coach.

Locating it, they glanced at one of the windows.

A man's face was seen on the outside of the netting.

"Dale!" flashed through Jack's mind.

He dashed over to the door, flung it open, and jumped out, but the sneaking rascal had disappeared.

Jack searched for him, but soon found it was useless.

Dale had made haste to get out of sight.

The shadows of twilight had fallen, enshrouding the camp in partial gloom, and lights gleamed in the shanties and tents.

Every one in the settlement had heard of Dale's escape in the past, and Jack resolved to arouse the camp by hunting him down.

They lost no time in carrying out this plan, and in a few moments every one heard that Martin Dale had been seen in the place, and a score of men went searching for him.

The canyon was scoured in every direction.

Half an hour later, as Jack stood near the Demon, a miner ran up to him.

"I've seen him! I've seen him!" he panted.

"Whereabouts?" eagerly asked Jack, staring at the man.

"Going out of the canyon on a big bay horse.

"Heading for the plains?"

"Yes."

Tim and Fritz returned just then.

When they heard what the miner said they cheered up.

"Get aboard of the Demon—quick!" said Jack.

He thought he could run the man down.

A minute afterward the electric vehicle went rolling away from the mining camp, and soon reached the plains.

By that time the moon had risen.

Jack scanned the surrounding country with a powerful glass, and presently detected the swiftly moving figure of a man on horseback several miles away.

He was traveling to the northwest, and seemed to be going at a very rapid pace.

"That must be him!" said the young inventor, pointing the figure out to his companions. "There isn't any one else in sight. We can soon find out. I'm going to follow him."

He steered the engine after the flying horseman.

Martin Dale had been heading across Death Valley, and was going toward the railroad.

He had such a lead on our friends that they did not over-haul him as fast as they hoped to.

But they finally drew near enough to see that they had made no error in pursuing this man, for they quickly recognized him.

He was riding like fury.

"We ought to reach him in five minutes," said Jack.

He pulled the lever over, putting on all the speed the electric engine was capable of, and she fairly skimmed over the ground.

"I'll hang onto his trail now till I run him down," said Jack grimly. "I am not to be balked. I won't do another thing but hunt that villain. He can't get away from me."

"Lord save yer, Jack. I'm afeered ye're mistaken," said Tim.

"Why so?" demanded the young inventor.

"Thar's a train jist leavin' Haiwee."

"So there is; and he has gone for it."

The horseman had sent his steed plunging up alongside the train, dismounted, and boarded the cars.

"That's the second time he has made his escape by taking to the railroad," said Jack in disgust.

"Do you know what train that is?" said Charley, looking at a time-table of the road. "It's the through express for Hawthorne at the south of Lake Walker."

"She's got about five miles start, hasn't she?"

"Yes; and something like two hundred miles to travel."

"I mean to race that train and overhaul the fugitive."

"She makes at least forty miles an hour."

"Oh, that don't frighten me. Dale can't get off, if she does not make any stops, and we have no streams to cross."

As Jack spoke, he put power on.

The Demon rushed for the track.

Here the traveling all the way to Big Pine was excellent, but the locomotive had got up steam, and was cutting along over the plain at the top of her speed.

The Demon raced along after her.

It was destined to be a long, stern race.

But few settlements marked the line of this road, and there was the prospect of a run for five hours without stopping.

Every one on the motor shared Jack's grim determination not to leave a stone unturned to capture the fugitive.

An hour passed by, and they reached Wen's Lake.

"It don't look very hopeful," said Jack.

"Why not?" resentfully asked Fritz.

"We haven't gained an inch on that train."

"Dey wouldn't stop her if yer dit, would dey?"

"No, I guess not, unless I made them do so."

"Perhaps it's just as well if we keep her in plain view until she reached the end of the route," consolingly said Charley.

"That's about all we can do," Jack replied.

An hour passed by, and they finally reached the border again.

The first excitement of the race was nothing to that which followed, for our friends kept pace with the flying express train, and were obliged to be constantly on the lookout for accidents.

Strive as hard as she would, the Demon could not gain any on the locomotive, although every effort to do so was made.

In due time they came in sight of Hawthorne.

This was where the express made its first stop, and they then felt sure of getting their man in the toils.

"Why is it you are so relentless with him?" Charley asked Jack.

"Why—have you forgotten the crime he committed?"

"No; but I thought it was a good riddance when Bob Crow was killed. He was as much our enemy as Dale was."

"Very true. But his character does not extenuate his crime. I am a firm believer in stern, inflexible justice."

This was a trait in Jack's character which Charley never had an opportunity of seeing before.

The train finally ran into Hawthorne.

She was far ahead of the Demon, and our friends feared that Dale would have a chance to leave her ere they could come up to the cars.

Although they gained considerably when the train slackened speed, they failed to reach it when it paused.

Every one who saw the Demon was astonished as she went racing up to the depot.

Jack paid no heed to anything but the work he had on hand, however, and when the electric machine reached the station he quickly alighted.

It was his intention to go through the cars in quest of Dale, but when he came in sight of the ticket office, a thrill went through him upon seeing the fugitive at the window.

He was purchasing a ticket for Carson City, and had his back turned to Jack as the young inventor approached.

Pulling a revolver from his belt, Jack strode up behind him, pressed the muzzle of the weapon at Dale's head, and said:

"You are my prisoner, sir!"

A cry of alarm escaped the rascal, and he swiftly glanced around.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

"Good heavens!" gasped Dale, upon seeing who spoke to him.

"Hands up! Quick, or I'll fire!"

Dale turned as pale as death, and obeyed.

Up went his hands over his head, and he cried hoarsely:

"Don't shoot! I surrender, Wright."

Just then Fritz, who had followed Jack, ran up to them.

"Dunner and blitzen! Got him fer sure?" he cried.

"Fritz, bind the rogue's arms behind his back and disarm him."

"Yah!" replied the Dutchman.

"If you move an inch you're a dead man, Dale!"

"Oh, I won't run. You've got the drop on me."

Fritz took his necktie and pinioned the man.

"Now march!" said Jack to the prisoner.

The rascal looked sullen and defiant, but he had no alternative, and therefore slouched along, followed by the spectators.

Jack walked in back of him, with his revolver clutched in his hand, and Fritz led the way to the motor.

A yell of delight escaped Charley and Tim when they saw that Jack had captured the miscreant.

They all went aboard, and here they put shackles upon the ankles and wrists of the rascal.

"Which way now, Jack?" queried the old sailor.

"Back to Carlin. The people in Elko County, where Dale killed his friend, will have to deal with him."

"It's a sure case o' hangin', my lad."

"No doubt; but the villain deserves it."

It was about 450 miles from where they were to the military reservation at Carlin, and the coach ran all night.

Just before daylight Lasso Charley and Fritz were on duty, the former steering the machine, when a camp was discerned far ahead under a big cottonwood tree.

They were within thirty miles of their destination, and as the cowboy was curious to see whose camp it was, he drove the engine over toward the lights.

In a short time they reached the camp.

The noise of the electric engine aroused the men, who were lying rolled in their blankets, and they got up.

"Hello!" yelled one of them. "It's Jack Wright's Demon of the Plains!"

These words plainly reached Charley's ears, and he peered harder at the men, and was surprised to see that they were the same gang of cowboys with whom Bob Crow and Martin Dale worked.

"Hello, boys! Glad to see you again."

"Where yer been?" asked one of them.

"Down to the border."

"Come back for anything special?"

"Yes. We are bringing Martin Dale back."

"What! Have you caught that murderer?"

"We have; and he's in the coach now."

"Let us see him, will you?"

"Of course. Come aboard. Let them in, Fritz."

The Dutchman went down and opened the door.

As he did so the twelve men eagerly swarmed into the Demon.

A yell of terror escaped Dale when he saw them, for he read in their stern looks that they had not come for nothing.

Indeed, his fears were realized at once, for they seized him and pulled him out of the coach.

"Hey, dere!" yelled Fritz, in surprise. "Vot you do mit our brisoner?"

"We are going to hang him for the murder he committed on this ranch."

Jack and Tim were aroused by the furious uproar, and came hastening out, overhearing what had been said.

"Hold on, there, boys!" shouted the young inventor. "You have no right to lynch that man. He must have a fair trial."

"He shall, Mr. Wright. Didn't you see him murder his pard?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "You know I did."

"Waal, thar's twelve in our party. That makes a legal jury," said the man, then turning to his companions, he

added: "You have all heard ther evidence o' this witness. Now, wot's ther verdict?"

"Guilty!" roared the whole crowd.

"Any one agin it?"

"No, no, no!"

"Then it's carried. I'll app'int myself judge."

"Ther sentence o' this court is that ther prisoner be hung!"

A wild howl escaped Martin Dale.

Jack violently protested, but although not a man answered him, they all drew their revolvers significantly and proceeded to adjust the noose of a lariat around Dale's neck.

The other end of the line was taken up in a tree by a cowboy, and the rest lifted Dale on a mustang's back under a big branch.

As soon as the line was tied fast and taut above, one of the cowboys struck the mustang, and it dashed away.

Martin Dale was left dangling by the neck at the end of the line.

The ends of justice were met.

"Don't blame us, Mr. Wright," said the leader of the cowboys. "We are all honest men. That 'ere traitor murdered his pard. No matter if ther murdered man wasn't moral—ther crime stan's jest ther same. It occurred on this ranch, an' it was expiated here."

"I can scarcely blame you," replied Jack.

Shortly afterwards he left them.

The motor was headed for California.

She continued her journey to the Pacific slope, and our friends passed a most enjoyable time during the trip.

Jack found a magnificent ranch, and purchased it in partnership with Lasso Charley.

Upon reaching San Francisco, the Demon of the Plains was taken apart and shipped back to Wrightstown.

Our friends followed it with Whiskers and Bismarck.

In due time they reached home, and here they stored the Demon away for future use.

Their trip was ended.

It had been very satisfactory from start to finish.

There was nothing more to be desired.

Jack was one of the most gifted of inventors.

He had not been in Wrightstown many months before his talent asserted itself again.

It was something entirely different than anything he had ever before patented.

We cannot betray what it was, but have another story in readiness for our readers, in which are described the wonderful adventures our three friends enjoyed with the invention.

Our account will follow this one very soon.

Until then, we will leave Jack, Tim and Fritz.

THE END

Read "THE MERRY TEN; OR, THE SHADOWS OF A SOCIAL CLUB," by Jno. B. Dowd, which will be the next number (259) of "Pluck and Luck."

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